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Turnaround Elementary Principals in Rural Missouri

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by

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Rural high poverty schools can often be invisible to those not living in rural areas. The number of students in rural areas is not far below the number of urban students, yet there has been little attention or research about rural school student achievement (Arnold et al., 2006; Pitchford 2011; Richard, 2005). The state of Missouri has established a program entitled Top Ten By Twenty. This initiative has been an impetus for change in rural high poverty schools. The program has led to increased student achievement in more than 60 rural high poverty schools. In this study, these schools were labeled "turnaround schools." The practices of "turnaround" principals in Missouri high poverty rural elementary schools were the focus of the study. A collective case study of elementary principals identified through Missouri Department of Education Data Reports and National Center for Educational Statistics led to the identification of the common practices used by the principals of the turnaround schools.

Seven themes emerged from the data: culture, leadership, curriculum and instruction, systems, challenges, stakeholders, and the Department of Secondary and Elementary Education. Each of the themes contributed to the school turnaround process. The study findings suggest practices that transform school culture and lead to school improvement.

Dedication

God has blessed me with wonderful people who have guided and supported me on this journey. To my best friend and husband, John, for supporting my passion for education, and keeping our day-to-day life running smoothly while I studied and traveled doing research. To our son Brian for understanding when I had to do homework, too. Mom, your love and encouragement gave me the confidence to succeed in any endeavor I chose throughout my life. Dad, I hope you are proudly smiling down from heaven.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The film, *Waiting for Superman* (2010), focused on the plight of five inner-city students in failing schools and their quest to get into public charter schools. The film highlighted the problems within the U.S. urban, inner city public school system. Living in Iowa, and working with colleagues from rural schools in the Midwest, I recognized the same urgent plight in our Midwest high poverty rural schools. Superman, according to lore, was from a small rural town, and depending on which state you consulted, could have been from one of several Midwest states (Bull, 2013; "Location of superman's hometown," 2013). At the beginning of the research study, the state assessment scores in ten Midwest states were examined. I began to conclude that Superman was nowhere in sight.

The data took a turn when I looked at Missouri's state assessment student achievement scores. First one school's data, and then another, showed a 10% or more increase in scores between the years of 2009 through 2013. By the time I finished examining test scores, more than 60 rural high poverty schools met the criteria of a 10% increase in scores between the years of 2009-2013. My focus became discovering why many schools in Missouri were able to accomplish what schools in other states have not. The purpose of this study was to describe the practices of "turnaround" principals in Missouri rural elementary schools.

Waiting for Superman demonstrated the urban flight from failing schools to charter and private schools. According the No Child Left Behind law, students in failing schools have the option to open enroll in another public school within the district, or enroll in enrichment programs with funding provided by the district. For many rural students, those options are not practical due to lack of availability or distance (Richard, 2002). Other options for rural parents include homeschooling or the district paying for the student to attend a neighboring district (Arnold, Newman, Gaddy & Dean, 2006). Like other options for rural students, neither of these may be viable. The ability to provide a quality education for rural high poverty students is a necessity.

Demographics

The number of students in rural areas is not far below the number of urban students, yet there has been little attention or research about rural school student achievement (Arnold et al., 2006; Pitchford 2011; Richard, 2005). Data from the National Center for Educational Statistics (2011) regarding student enrollment in public elementary and secondary schools by school locale is displayed in Table 1, and Free and Reduced Lunch student population data is displayed in Table 2.

Based on Table 1, 24% of the students in the United States attend schools in rural areas, and 29% of the students in the United States attend schools in cities. The number of city students does not differentiate inner-city students. However, research on rural schools has not been conducted. An additional issue of concern is the number of students who are considered to be at the poverty level in rural schools, versus the number of

Table 1.

Number and percentage of students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools, by school locale: Fall 2010

School Locale	Number of Students	Percentage of Students
United States Total	49,169,444	100%
City Total	**14,425,277**	**29%**
Large	7,544,845	15%
Midsize	3,186,381	6%
Small	3,694,051	8%
Suburban Total	**16,871,633**	**34%**
Large	14,290,281	29%
Midsize	1,580,430	3%
Small	1,000,922	2%
Town Total	**5,840,686**	**12%**
Fringe	939,047	2%
Distant	3,066,439	6%
Remote	1,835,200	4%
Rural Total	**12,031,848**	**24%**
Fringe	7,418,279	15%
Distant	3,459,521	7%
Remote	1,154,048	2%

NOTE: Totals exclude students in schools for which enrollment data are not available. U.S. total excludes 8,173 students attending schools for which locale data are not available. Adapted from National Center for Educational Statistics, (2011) *Table A.1.a.-3 Number of students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools, by school locale and state or jurisdiction: Fall 2010*, retrieved on July 19, 2013 from http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ruraled/tables/a.1.a.-3_2010_2.asp?refer=.

students who are considered to be at the poverty level in city schools. Figure 1, from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) (2011) provides insight. Using the data from NCES, the percent of students enrolled in schools where 51% or more of the students qualify for Free and Reduced Lunch in rural areas (fringe, distant and remote) equals 40.3% of rural students. The percent of students enrolled in schools where 51% or more of the students qualify for Free and Reduced Lunch in cities (large, mid size and small) equals 64.3% of the students.

Reardon (2013) provided new data on income and achievement levels. The data demonstrated a clear correlation between income level and achievement. The gap has widened from the 1960s to 2013, showing low-income students have lower achievement levels in reading in comparison to their peers. When looking at race, Reardon showed the achievement gap has been narrowing. According to a National Assessment of Educational Progress (Pennington, 2010) study in Iowa, the data from 2005-2007 produced results showing "district percentage of free or reduced lunch was significantly correlated with district scores in math, reading and science. The negative correlation indicated that as the percentage of students eligible for Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL) goes down, average scores go up" (p. 3).

Further indication of increasing rural poverty in the United States can be found in *Rural America at a Glance* (2014). The rural poverty rate was 18.2% in 2013, up from 16.5% in 2010 and the highest rate since 1993. In contrast, the urban poverty rate

Table 2.

Number and percentage distribution of public elementary and secondary enrollment, by percentage of students in school eligible for free or reduced-price lunch and school locale: Fall 2010

School locale	Total	10 percent or less	11–25 percent	26–50 percent	51–75 percent	More than 75 percent
	Enrollment					
Total	**48,933,094**	**4,436,102**	**7,339,659**	**14,192,916**	**13,080,719**	**9,883,698**
City	**14,333,807**	**840,721**	**1,213,738**	**3,070,715**	**3,796,444**	**5,412,189**
Large	7,468,996	352,666	485,441	1,246,513	1,845,047	3,539,329
Midsize	3,180,612	239,159	327,422	711,648	852,862	1,049,521
Small	3,684,199	248,896	400,875	1,112,554	1,098,535	823,339
Suburban	**16,784,156**	**2,512,308**	**3,711,522**	**4,691,219**	**3,515,302**	**2,353,805**
Large	14,206,334	2,335,216	3,214,109	3,751,969	2,846,672	2,058,368
Midsize	1,578,331	121,894	334,893	547,131	388,881	185,532
Small	999,491	55,198	162,520	392,119	279,749	109,905
Town	**5,817,900**	**142,494**	**503,519**	**2,120,711**	**2,153,786**	**897,390**
Fringe	938,745	48,253	211,950	364,397	205,705	108,440
Distant	3,050,054	61,713	202,054	1,130,536	1,169,155	486,596
Remote	1,829,101	32,528	89,515	625,778	778,926	302,354
Rural	**11,997,231**	**940,579**	**1,910,880**	**4,310,271**	**3,615,187**	**1,220,314**
Fringe	7,391,877	822,951	1,550,650	2,555,666	1,835,182	627,428
Distant	3,452,725	98,741	322,553	1,373,008	1,284,905	373,518
Remote	1,152,629	18,887	37,677	381,597	495,100	219,368
	Percentage distribution					
Total	**100.0**	**9.1**	**15.0**	**29.0**	**26.7**	**20.2**
City	**100.0**	**5.9**	**8.5**	**21.4**	**26.5**	**37.8**
Large	100.0	4.7	6.5	16.7	24.7	47.4
Midsize	100.0	7.5	10.3	22.4	26.8	33.0
Small	100.0	6.8	10.9	30.2	29.8	22.3
Suburban	**100.0**	**15.0**	**22.1**	**28.0**	**20.9**	**14.0**
Large	100.0	16.4	22.6	26.4	20.0	14.5
Midsize	100.0	7.7	21.2	34.7	24.6	11.8
Small	100.0	5.5	16.3	39.2	28.0	11.0
Town	**100.0**	**2.4**	**8.7**	**36.5**	**37.0**	**15.4**
Fringe	100.0	5.1	22.6	38.8	21.9	11.6
Distant	100.0	2.0	6.6	37.1	38.3	16.0
Remote	100.0	1.8	4.9	34.2	42.6	16.5
Rural	**100.0**	**7.8**	**15.9**	**35.9**	**30.1**	**10.2**
Fringe	100.0	11.1	21.0	34.6	24.8	8.5
Distant	100.0	2.9	9.3	39.8	37.2	10.8
Remote	100.0	1.6	3.3	33.1	43.0	19.0

NOTE: Free or reduced-price lunch is provided by the National School Lunch Program—a federally assisted meal program. To be eligible, a student must be from a household with an income at or below 130 percent of the poverty threshold for free lunch, or between 130 percent and 185 percent of the poverty threshold for reduced-price lunch. In total, 666 public schools with student enrollment did not report information on the number of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Therefore, this information is missing for 236,350 students and these students are not included in this table. For more details on urban-centric locale categories, see http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ruraled/page2.asp. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding and missing data. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey" 2010–11 (version 2a).

dropped slightly to 15.4% in 2013. “Rural median household income was $41,198 in 2012. In inflation-adjusted dollars, the rural median household income in 2012 was 8.4 percent below its pre-recessionary peak of $44,974 in 2007” (p.3).

No Child Left Behind

The 2001 mandate of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) put pressure on schools to ensure that all students were proficient by 2014 (U.S. Public Law 107-110, 2001). The law came up for reauthorization in 2007, and as of November 2015, eight years overdue, two different bills passed the House of Representatives and the Senate, with no reauthorization in place. The House version is known as the Student Success Act and the Senate version is known as the Every Child Achieves Act (Schneider, M., 2015). According to the original NCLB act, schools must meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), which is defined specifically by each state. According to NCLB, the other criteria necessary in addition to academic achievement at the elementary level are (1) participation rates on the State’s assessment, and (2) at least one other academic indicator, as determined by the State, for all public elementary schools (Public law 107-110, 2001). Schools that do not meet AYP for two years in a row are classified as Schools in Need of Assistance (SINA). If SINA schools are unable to show improvement, there are sanctions that range from parents being able to choose a different school, to restructuring of the school in cases of four or more years on the SINA list (Iowa Department of Education, 2012). Schools that are located in rural areas are hard hit by these sanctions. When a school is required to restructure, faculty are often a main part of the process. Harmon (2001) addressed the difficulties of recruiting teachers in rural schools. Among the

difficulties, he listed lack of social life, isolation, lack of services in the community, limited opportunity for spouse employability, no willingness to relocate, high workload, lack of money, lack of promotion opportunities and lack of support group.

Race to the Top

President Obama's answer to NCLB is a program entitled Race to the Top. Race to the Top does not do away with NCLB, but is an additional program. On February 17, 2009, President Obama signed into law the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), which was designed to stimulate the economy and includes education (*Race to the Top*, 2009). The ARRA supports education reform by investing in "innovative strategies that are most likely to lead to improved results for students, long-term gains in school and school system capacity, and increased productivity and effectiveness"(*Race to the Top*, 2009, p. 2). Race to the Top Fund, a competitive $4.35 billion grant program, is designed to encourage and reward states that are creating the conditions for education innovation and reform, and implementing plans in four core education reform areas:

- "Adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy;
- Building data systems that measure student growth and success, and inform teachers and principals about how they can improve instruction;

- Recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals, especially where they are needed most; and
- Turning around our lowest-achieving schools" (*Race to the Top*, 2009, p. 2).

In 2015, 42 states, Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia had been granted waivers from the requirements of NCLB under Race to the Top. Also new with Race to the Top were Focus and Priority schools, based on student achievement. A Focus School **"**refers to schools with stubborn achievement gaps or weak performance among 'subgroup' students, such as English-language learners or students in special education. States must identify 10 percent of their schools as focus' schools" (Klein, 2015, p. 6). Priority School is a term that "refers to schools identified as one of the lowest performers in the state and subject to dramatic interventions, including potential leadership changes. States must identify at least 5 percent of their schools as 'priority schools'" (Klein, 2015, p. 6).

Funding

There is a funding component of No Child Left Behind. It authorized federal money to be allocated to two programs, the Small and Rural Schools Achievement Program and the Rural and Low-Income Schools Program (RLISP). Although $300 million was authorized, Congress only appropriated $162 million (Richard, 2002). In 2011, the total funding allocation to these two programs had minimal growth. RLISP was allocated $87,266,188.00 (U.S. Department of Education, 2011) and the Small and Rural Schools Achievement Program was allocated the same amount, $87,266,188.00 (U.S.

Department of Education, 2012) for a total of $174,532,376.00 during a ten-year period. RLISP funds can be used by districts for teacher recruitment and retention; teacher professional development; educational technology, including software and hardware; parental involvement activities; activities authorized under the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities; and activities for Language Instruction for Limited English and Immigrant Students (U.S. Department of Education, 2011). The purpose of the Small and Rural Schools Achievement Program is "to provide financial assistance to rural districts to assist them in meeting their state's definition of AYP. Applicants do not compete but rather are entitled to funds if they meet basic eligibility requirements. Eligibility is restricted by statute" (U.S. Department of Education, 2012, p. 1).

Local and state funding are sources of disparity in rural schools. At the local level, the funding formula is typically based on local property taxes. According to Beeson (2001), "property taxes inherently discriminate against rural areas where farmland and woodlands are taxed less than residential and commercial property" (p. 23) in urban areas. State funding formulas are based on enrollment, and, in schools with declining populations, the funding exacerbates the funding concerns causing further disparity in the urban and rural education systems.

Leadership Challenges

Why focus on principals in rural schools? Teacher effectiveness is known to be the number one factor to impact student achievement. Studies indicate the building principal has an impact on teacher success and is the second leading school-related factor in learning. Effective leaders maximize the potential of their building (Mendels &

Mitgang, 2013; Pitchford, 2011). Rural principals play a more varied role in education than their urban counterparts. Along with being the instructional leader, they also have many other formal and informal roles. In a small town or rural area, the school is typically the hub of the community. The principal is the face of the school at all times, during the work day, and while grocery shopping, at church, or at a child's ballgame. The principal's role includes public relations. Principals also may serve in the roles of curriculum director or school counselor (Howley, Pendarvis, & Woodrum, 2005). Beeson (2001) added to the list, "part innovator, part negotiator, and part magician, to make school run smoothly" (p. 22). Rural school principals perform these duties while making, on average, $10,000 less than their urban peers (Beeson, 2001). As stated earlier, highly qualified teachers are difficult to attract and retain, so are school leaders. Brown-Ferrigno and Allen (2006) raised the concern that there is limited research on rural education issues and, in particular, the recruitment and retention of adequately prepared principals.

Turnaround Schools

Leithwood, Harris and Strauss (2010), in, *Leading School Turnaround: How Successful Leaders Transform Low-Performing Schools*, noted a large body of work on how to turn failing businesses around, but very little research has been completed regarding schools. However, that is exactly what failing schools are called to do or they face denial of accreditation, state takeover, or school closure (Duke, 2004). Kowel and Hassel (2005) found that a school's leadership makes a big difference in its success.

Research has been completed on leadership in general, yet there is little research that applies to turnaround school leaders.

Statement of Purpose

Given the limited research on rural turnaround schools and their principals, the purpose of the study was to describe the practices of "turnaround" principals in Missouri rural elementary school settings. The term "turnaround" is a recent term in education used to describe a once failing school, by NCLB standards, that has accomplished just what the name implies, turned-around. The school has improved test scores and met AYP.

In order to study rural turnaround schools, the source used to identify the Missouri schools was the Missouri Department of Education Comprehensive Data System Statewide Assessment Reports and the National Center for Educational Statistics School Search. Schools chosen are reported as "Rural" had more than 40% Free and Reduced Lunch rates, and according to the School Assessment Reports had a gain of 10% or more in Reading or Math proficiency. Using principal, superintendent and Missouri Department of Education Consultant interviews, I examined common practices of the principals of the schools.

Theoretical Framework

George MacGregor Burns (2003) defined transformational leadership as not a set of specific behaviors, but rather an ongoing process by which "leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of morality and motivation" (Burns, 2003, p. 20). Transformational leaders offer a purpose that transcends short-term goals and focuses on higher order intrinsic needs. The study of turnaround elementary principals was

conducted using a collective case study along with demographic and achievement data. The data were used to capture the practices used in transformational leadership.

Research Questions

The purpose of the study was to describe the practices of "turnaround" principals in rural elementary school settings. The central question of the collective case study was, "What are the practices of turnaround principals in the rural elementary settings?" Research questions were:

- What actions has the state of Missouri taken to increase student achievement?
- What contributes to the success of the schools that have increased student achievement?

Definition of Terms

Adequate yearly progress (AYP) - A State's definition of AYP is based on expectations for growth in student achievement that is continuous and substantial, such that all students are proficient in reading and math no later than 2013-2014 (*U.S. Department of Education*, 2013).

Free and reduced lunch (FRL) – Students who qualify for free or reduced lunch is calculated based on the family's annual income and number of family members. There are some children who are categorically eligible because they fall into a specific category such as homeless, runaway, migrant, foster child, or Head Start (Federal Register, 2013).

Metro – Defined by the Office of Management and Budget as:

1. Central counties with one or more urbanized areas; urbanized areas (described in the next section) are densely-settled urban entities with 50,000 or more people.
2. Outlying counties that are economically tied to the core counties as measured by labor-force commuting. Outlying counties are included if 25% of workers living in the county commute to the central counties, or if 25% of the employment in the county consists of workers coming out from the central counties—the so-called "reverse" commuting pattern. (U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, 2013).

Midsize city -- Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with population less than 250,000 and greater than or equal to 100,000 (NCES, 2013).

Non-metro - Defined by the Office of Management and Budget as:

1. Micropolitan (micro) areas, which are non-metro labor-market areas centered on urban clusters of 10,000-49,999 persons and defined with the same criteria used to define metro areas.
2. All remaining counties often labeled “noncore” counties, because they are not part of “core-based” metro or micro areas (U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, 2013).

Large city -- Territory outside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with population of 250,000 or more (NCES, 2013).

No Child Left Behind – A public law passed on January 8, 2002 whose purpose was to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child is left behind (U.S. Public Law 107-110, 2002).

Rural fringe -- United States census defined rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area, as well as territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban center (NCES, 2013).

Rural distant – United States census defined rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster (NCES, 2013).

Rural remote -- United States census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is more than 10 miles from an urban cluster (NCES, 2013).

Poverty - Following the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) Statistical Policy Directive 14, the Census Bureau uses a set of money income thresholds that vary by family size and composition to determine who is in poverty. If a family's total income is less than the family's threshold, then that family and every individual in it is considered in poverty. The official poverty thresholds do not vary geographically, but they are updated for inflation using Consumer Price Index (CPI-U). The official poverty definition uses money income before taxes and does not include capital gains or noncash benefits (such as public housing, Medicaid, and food stamps).

SINA schools -- If a school does not meet the annual AYP state participation goals or state Annual Measurable Objectives (AMO) in reading or mathematics assessment in either the "all students" group or any one of the subgroups for two consecutive years, it is designated as a school in need of assistance, which is also referred to as SINA (School in Need of Assistance). SINA schools that receive Title I funds are required to comply with NCLB sanctions, which include writing a plan and offering school choice. SINA schools that do not receive Title I funds, would not have to comply with NCLB sanctions, although it may be advantageous to work through the planning process (*Iowa Department of Education*, 2012).

Small city -- Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with a population less than 100,000 (NCES, 2013).

Turnaround principal – A school leader who has reversed the downward spiral of a low-performing school (Duke, 2004).

Turnaround school – Schools that have increased their assessment scores in reading or math by 10% over a five-year period.

Limitations and Delimitations

"Bounding the case" (Yin, 2014) is defining the case parameters from which they were chosen and how they can be generalized. Principals of Missouri rural schools that had a 10% or more increase in state assessment proficiency scores from 2009 to 2013 in Reading or Math were selected to participate in this study. Research was conducted through interviews and a survey. As the sole researcher, researcher bias was present.

Due to the qualitative nature of the study, varying racial demographics, and funding sources, the findings of the study cannot be generalized to all rural schools. The study can be used for analytic generalization (Yin, 2014) of these schools in their relation to the common practices of the principals participating in the study.

Summary

To describe the practices of "turnaround" principals in the rural elementary school setting was the purpose of the study. The limited research on rural schools, along with the lack of turnaround leadership literature specific to rural schools, was a driving force behind the study. Elementary principals and superintendents who are at Missouri high poverty rural schools, which had a 10% increase in assessment scores between 2009 and 2013, participated in the study through interviews. Elementary schools in the study were classified as rural distant or rural remote. Missouri Department Education consultants were interviewed regarding the actions taken by the state of Missouri to increase student achievement. Data from the interviews were used to determine common practices of "turnaround" elementary principals.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this collective case study was to examine the practices of principals in rural, turnaround Missouri elementary schools. The review of literature provides an examination of rural schools, poverty, student achievement, and turnaround leadership.

Research in Rural Education

In the article, "A Look at the Condition of Rural Education Research: Setting a Direction for Future Research," Arnold, Newman, Gaddy and Dean (2005) examined the research from 1991 through 2003 on rural education. They found school leaders to be "eager for information about research-based interventions and strategies that enhance student success in rural communities" (p.1), but "identifying such interventions is difficult due to a lack of high-quality research specifically geared to rural settings" (p.1). The top ten research topics they found were, listed beginning with the most frequently researched topic for a total of 198 rural-specific abstracts:

1. Programs and strategies for students with special needs
2. Instruction
3. School safety and discipline
4. Student life and work planning
5. Factors influencing academic achievement
6. Students' attitudes and behaviors

7. Education leadership
8. Staff recruitment and retention
9. Teacher preparation and development
10. Teachers' beliefs and practices (Arnold et al., p.5)

These research areas also were areas that presented challenges to rural education. Sherwood (2000) wrote about the lack of research regarding rural education. He stated that a goal of the research should be to "address the weaknesses by building on the strengths" (p. 161).

Rural Schools

Until the 20th century, most of the U.S. population was rural and consequently so were the schools (Howley, et al. 2005; Theobald, 2005). One-room schoolhouses gradually disappeared to make way for larger industrial model schools first promoted by Horace Mann in the 1800's (Howley, et al., 2005; Chalker, 2002). There has been a shift in curriculum from local schools that promoted the community's educational goals for their children, to the Common Core Curriculum Standards adopted by all but five states as of 2013 ("Common Core State," 2012). Rural schools in 2013 and their communities were sifting through the effects of ongoing educational reforms.

The geographical location and demographics of each school brings with it characteristics that are unique. These distinctive characteristics influence the needed traits and practices of the school leaders. To be successful, rural principals require a different set of practices from their urban counterparts (Howley, et al., 2005; Chalker, 2002). Within the rural community landscape, there are a variety of community circumstances,

which differentiate each rural leadership situation. In the cultural and political context, three categories of rural communities exist; rural poor, traditional middle America, and communities in transition. In communities classified as rural poor, the values are mainly traditional with a low-income level and support of the school is generally low. Traditional Middle America communities have somewhat traditional values, middle class income levels and high support for local schools. The communities in transition are experiencing an influx of outsiders, which causes a wide variety of income levels, values and school support. Dependent upon the location of the community, there may be an increase in poor immigrant populations, and with that, new challenges (Howley, et al., 2005)

School consolidation has long been part of rural education, but in the early years it was the act of moving from one-room schoolhouses to common graded schools. In recent years, the small common schools have become consolidated districts in order to survive economically, attract teachers, and in hope of providing a higher quality education. Rural public schools are expected to change to look and function like their urban and suburban peers, regardless of whether or not that is what is best for the rural students (Chalker, 2002). Howley, Johnson and Petrie (2011) completed a study on rural school and district consolidations. They found most of the rationale behind school and district consolidation did not bear the fruit claimed by proponents. Their findings were as follows:

1. In many places, schools and districts are already too large for fiscal efficiency or educational quality; deconsolidation is more likely than

consolidation to achieve substantial efficiencies and yield improved outcomes.

2. Financial claims about widespread benefits of consolidation are unsubstantiated by contemporary research about cost savings (mostly, but not exclusively, from research on district consolidation) and learning (mostly, but not exclusively, from school-size research).
3. Claims for educational benefits from systematic statewide school and district consolidation are vastly overestimated and have already been maximized. Schools that are too large result in diminished academic and social performance, and some evidence suggests that the same conclusion applies to districts that are too large.
4. Which de-consolidations would likely produce improvement can be judged only on a case-by-case basis, with attention to the devilish details that sweeping state policies cannot provide. The same is true for the few consolidations involving very small numbers of administrators, teachers, and students that might seem advisable.
5. Impoverished places, in particular, often benefit from smaller schools and districts, and can suffer irreversible damage if consolidation occurs.
6. Overall, state-level consolidation proposals appear to serve a public relations purpose in times of fiscal crisis, rather than substantive fiscal or educational purposes (Howley, et al., 2011,p. 11-12).

Studies showed that in poor rural schools, the larger the school the lower the achievement. In affluent schools, the larger the school, the greater the achievement (Howley, et al., 2005). Other drawbacks to consolidation for students included increases to the bus transportation times for students, less individual attention in the larger schools, and fewer opportunities to participate in co-curricular and extra curricular activities due to increased competition and transportation. Families experienced a loss of community, fewer opportunities to participate in leadership roles such as Board of Education and booster clubs, as well as barriers to classroom visits, volunteer opportunities and conferences due to travel distances (Chalker, 2002; Howley, 2005; Howley, 2011; Strange, et al., 2012). When adapting to the culture of the newly consolidated school or district, students were more resilient than teachers and parents. In addition, it was easier for the students, teachers and parents of the remaining school to adapt to the changes than the students, teachers and parents of the school that closed (Howley, et al, 2011).

All is not bleak in regards to rural education. There are strengths to be praised in rural education. According to Howley, et al, "Despite rumors to the contrary, rural students do not perform less well academically than non-rural students" (p.41). The previous statement appears to contradict the premise behind this study. The focus of the study was specifically the subset of rural schools that are high poverty, once failing and have become turnaround schools.

A questionnaire was given to college students in North Carolina, which asked them to describe what they thought of "rural." Overall student responses portrayed positive images using descriptors such as good, peaceful, beautiful, safe, and caring.

Many of the descriptions touched on positive images of community (Chalker, 2002). For the rural community, the school also was the center of the community's social life. The extra-curricular activities such as band, athletics and drama provide entertainment for the community (Howley, et al., 2005).

Rural Principals

"Pedagogy of Place"

The experiences of principals in rural schools cannot be pigeonholed into a one-size fits all description. Each community has a unique culture, population and configuration. Rural educational leaders describe both formal and informal structures put into place to accomplish goals with the term "pedagogy of place" (Chalker, 2002, loc. 2885). The advice from fourteen rural principals interviewed by Hurley included "1) become a part of the community, 2) focus on people and relationships, 3) move sincerely but slowly, and 4) expect to work hard" (Chalker, 2002, loc. 3155). One interviewee pointed out the expectation that rural principals be servant leaders. "The rural folks are quick to judge you on approachability, your work, your handshake. They don't agree with appointments. They have time off, you are a servant of the county, and they expect to see you" (loc. 3194).

The Annenberg Rural Challenge, now known as the Rural School and Community Trust, sponsored a program funded by the Annenberg Foundation with the purpose of building on "pedagogy of place" to encourage rural schools to build a distinctive program that would engage community members in the school (*The Annenberg Challenge*, n.d.). The Annenberg funds are no longer available, although the Rural School and Community

Trust still provides a gamut of resources including funds, grants and scholarships; publications; place-based learning information; policy reports; and administrator, teacher, student and parent information. The Rural School and Community Trust states, “Our mission is to help rural schools and communities grow better together”(*The Rural School and Community Trust, para. 1,* 2013).

Challenges

In the culture of high stakes testing and unique demands rural areas present, there are some common challenges facing rural principals. The first need for rural principals is professional development. According to Howley, Chadwick and Howley (2002), professional development challenges exist due to the tendency of rural principals to be less educated than their urban and suburban peers, be geographically isolated, fulfill a wider range of roles and have higher turnover. Another challenge facing rural principals is a lack of school funding due in part to declining enrollment and the local property tax funding formulas (Beeson, 2001). Less money creates problems with facilities, instructional supplies, and teacher retention and recruitment (Beeson, 2001; Eady & Zepeda, 2007). Another challenge to the rural principal is the lack of distinct roles. The principal in a small school is curriculum director, counselor, instructional leader, and community liaison. Principals must also balance the needs of the school to meet state and national curriculum guidelines while honoring the traditions and educational needs of the local community. The lines between the community and school are not distinct. In many rural areas, the school is the social center of the community (Howley, et al., 2005).

Poverty

Prevalence of Poverty

Poverty is the biggest challenge students must overcome in education with study after study showing the higher the poverty rate, the lower the achievement (Reardon, 2013; Beeson & Strange, 2003). The poverty rate in America's rural areas has grown. Rural poverty rates in the 1990's equaled or exceeded those in America's central cities. In 2000 almost one in five rural children age 17 or under lived in poverty (Howley, et al. 2005). In the 2012 *Rural Matters* report, of those attending schools in a rural district, two in five children lived in poverty; one in four was a child of color; and one in eight had changed residence in the past 12 months (Strange, Johnson, Showalter & Klein, 2012). According to Strange, policy director for the Rural School and Community Trust, "We used to think of the Great Plains as a place of moderate but stable income, widely dispersed. It isn't that way anymore. The Great Plains is a growing center of poverty in the United States – and it's rural poverty" (Hardy, 2005, p. 19).

Poverty and Achievement

How does poverty impact academic achievement? Jensen (2013) cited seven differences children of poverty experience, which affects their classroom engagement. The first difference was poor nutrition and diminished health practices, which can be tied to exposure to lead paint, untreated ear infections, skipping breakfast, and lack of proper medical interventions. Poor health and nutrition was linked to problems with listening, attention, learning and behavior. Second, children from low socioeconomic backgrounds came to school with a smaller vocabulary than their middle class peers. "Low-income

children hear on average 13 million words by age four. Middle-income children on average hear 26 million words and upper-income children on average hear 46 million words by age four" (p. 25-26). The third difference Jensen cited was effort. The lack of effort can be due to lack of hope, learned helplessness, and inability to relate to the teacher. The fourth difference was hope and growth mindset. "In short, being poor is associated with lowered expectations about future outcomes" (p. 27). Cognition is the fifth difference. Performance on intelligence tests and academic achievement was generally lower in children from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Cognitive capacity was teachable, and low cognitive ability can be due to lack of vocabulary, inability to focus, poor memory or poor processing skills. The sixth difference was relationships. "Three-quarters of all children from poverty have a single-parent caregiver" (p. 28). Stress in the home, instability, and a lack of support can all cause children to become insecure and stressed. The final difference in children of poverty was distress. Children living in poverty have greater amounts of stress, which can affect the immune system, brain development, social competence, impulsivity, and working memory.

Eaton (2013), in a presentation at the Critical Issues Forum at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, relayed information in regards to high poverty schools and student achievement. She shared evidence that students from a high poverty area placed in low poverty schools, outperformed their peers who remained in high poverty schools. The conclusion Eaton (2013) shared throughout her presentation was simple. "Poverty is really, really bad." The presentation also included the effect poverty has on students.

Poverty is associated with problems that include impulse regulation, health, mood, and achievement.

The need to break up concentrated student poverty was also supported by Potter (2013). In looking at successful diverse charter schools, seven diverse charter schools were profiled. "The low-income students attending diverse charter schools out performed their low-income peers not attending diverse schools, statewide in mathematics and reading, sometimes by dramatic margins" (p. 42). The Coleman Report of the 1960's found that the "strongest school-related predictor of student achievement was the socio-economic composition of the student body" (p. 39). Eaton and Potter drew attention to the role income level of the school plays in achievement with students of poverty and made a case for the integration of socioeconomic levels to foster success. Leithwood, Harris and Strauss, (2010) supported Eaton and Potter's conclusions in their book, *Leading School Turnaround: How Successful Leaders Transform Low-Performing Schools.* A key point made was, "The negative effects of poverty and diversity on student learning are greatly magnified in schools with homogeneous populations" (p. 40). Homogeneous population refers to populations in which there is not a mix of students from various socio-economic backgrounds.

Turnaround Leadership

There is a distinct difference between school improvement and turnaround schools. School improvement is a gradual process, whereas turnaround schools experience dramatic, transformative change. Pointing to the role of leadership in the turnaround process, Leithwood, et al. stated (2010), "Evidence from several other recent

lines of school turnaround research also indicates a central role for leadership" (p. 14). They made two claims about successful leadership. The first was "successful leaders in almost all contexts engage in a common core of practices" and second, "successful leaders are also exquisitely sensitive to the contexts in which they find themselves" (p. 17).

Among the common core practices, the first examined by Leithwood, et al. (2010) was to create a shared sense of direction. A shared sense of direction was created when leaders established short-term goals in a collaborative environment, increased expectations of teachers and students, communicated the school's purpose, plans and expectations to all stakeholders, and were the primary source of direction setting practices. The second practice was to build capacity. Capacity was built when leaders provided support for colleagues, stimulated professional development, promoted reflection on professional practices, modeled appropriate practices, and valued contributions to improvement. The third practice of the turnaround principal was to redesign the school. Norms were nurtured that encouraged collaboration and improvement of instructional practices, provided structures for collaboration, encouraged connections between the home and school, ensured access to needed social service agencies, and provided adequate resources for the instructional program. The fourth and final practice of turnaround leaders was to manage the school's instructional program. Essential to the instructional program was to recruit and assign teachers who could further the school's effort, monitor student learning and adjust practices accordingly,

buffer the staff from external demands, and provide support through resources, personnel and programs.

The second claim Leithwood et al. (2010), made about turnaround leaders was their acute awareness of the context in which they found themselves. There was no prescribed list of contexts and the practices that corresponded. Leaders must understand the characteristics of the setting of their school. Is the school high poverty, inner city, rural, racially diverse, or homogeneous? As decisions are made and leadership practices pursued, the context of the school can decide success or failure.

Kowel, Hassel and Hassel (2009) listed six leader actions in a turnaround school: focus on a few early wins; break organization norms; push rapid-fire experimentation; get the right staff, right the remainder; drive decisions with open-air data; and lead a turnaround campaign (p. 4). In practice, Sternberg (2004) described Janice Cover, the principal of Pine Grove, a turnaround school in Florida. In the account, Cover recounted her practice that made all teachers reapply for their jobs. The teachers needed to make a three-year commitment and agree to actively work to turn the school around. Cover also visited student homes, studied student data with her teachers and spent a summer with faculty writing new lesson plans. Cover's story illustrated elements of the works of both Kowel et al. and Leithwood et al.

The principal as a CEO is another image of the turnaround principal. In the CEO analogy of turnaround leadership, Hollar (2004) itemized the traits of a turnaround principal as having a vision of what "could be," cultivating buy-in, and initiating change. There were specific characteristics Hollar (2004) also attributed to turnaround principals:

they were bright; goal-oriented; authentic; inspiring, tireless and intuitive. They made sure teachers had time, and had not forgotten what it is like to be a teacher. They had heart, timing, love of learning, high expectations and did not want center stage.

One aspect of leadership is enabling teachers. According to Duke (2004), a key tenant of turnaround leadership is the ability to enable staff, which he defined as enabling teachers to "confront their beliefs; assess and refine their instructional skills; increase instructional time for struggling students; improve student instructional grouping; establish and sustain orderly learning environments; and use data to monitor progress" (p. 23).

To examine the turnaround at Dr. Freddie Thomas Middle School in Rochester, New York, Cianca and Lampe (2010) used the image of a three-legged stool to explain the successful turnaround of the school. The three legs of the stool are systems, culture and instruction. After a string of short-term principals, there was role confusion, a lack of vision and lack of order in the school. When a new principal was appointed in 2003, the first system change instituted was order, with teachers greeting students as they entered the building creating a safe and welcoming atmosphere. Next, the schedule was revamped into a block schedule resulting in increased instructional time, order and security, which "restored hope to the young men and women" (p. 52). The third system introduced to the school was internal and external cameras eliminating the need for police officers in the school. Additional guidance counselors were also added.

The second leg of the stool was the school culture. The goal of the leadership team was to create a sense of community. Faculty members "adopted" students to support

their success. School leaders created a "brand" for the school through celebrations, rituals, routines, a school logo, and common sayings and symbols throughout the building, which gave a sense of connection and identity.

The final leg of the stool for Thomas Middle School was instruction. Teaching teams were given common plan times enabling teachers to collaborate on lesson plans, instructional coaching and training. Common assessments were also developed, with "formative assessment essential to effective instruction" (p.54). In 2010, when Cianca and Lampe told the story of Thomas Middle School, the school had continued to build on the foundation of their three-legged stool established in 2003 when they began their turnaround journey.

Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

In August of 2012, the state of Missouri was granted a waiver from the Elementary and Secondary Schools Act (ESEA), also known as No Child Left behind. This waiver came from the state school improvement initiative known as MSIP 5, the Missouri School Improvement Program 5th Cycle, with a tagline of Top 10 By 20. The goal of the Department of Education is to be in the top ten states in achievement by the year 2020. In 1993, the Missouri legislature enacted the Outstanding Schools Act of 1993. The Outstanding Schools Act of 1993 created a set of rigorous academic standards and a performance-based state level assessment. The Act also required the Department to identify Academically Deficient Schools, or chronically low-performing buildings and gave the Department the authority to intervene at the building level. Regional professional development centers were created to provide a statewide system of support

for districts and teachers in implementing reform efforts. The result of the Outstanding Schools Act was a continued evolution of the MSIP system to the current MSIP 5 and the NCLB waiver ("History of the Missouri School Improvement Program").

Under MSIP 5, Title I schools are given designations based on student achievement and improvement. The categories are:

- Reward school - High achievement for all students and those schools that are making significant progress in closing the achievement gap.
- Priority school - The lowest-performing schools in the state when considering the school's overall student population. In priority schools, the Department will intervene with rapid and targeted interventions to build capacity at the local level for district-focused school improvement.
- Focus school - Focus schools are Title 1 schools whose Student Gap Groups are among the lowest-performing in the state according to state assessment results. Interventions and support will assist identified schools in improving the performance of all students, with a particular focus on improving the performance of groups of students that have the greatest achievement gap (Missouri's No Child Left Behind Flexibility Waiver).

Summary

In the 2012 publication of *Why Rural Matters: The Condition of Rural Education in the 50 States*, Strange, Johnson, Showalter and Klein concluded, "Growth in rural school enrollment is outpacing non-rural enrollment growth in the United States, and rural schools are becoming more complex with increasing rates of poverty, diversity, and special needs students" (p. 21). With increasing pressure for school improvement, finding the key to turnaround rural schools is essential. In this chapter, an examination of the changing and unique circumstances of rural schools, the impact of poverty on student achievement, and turnaround leadership were presented.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Introduction

The purpose of the collective case was to identify the practices of "turnaround" principals in the rural Missouri elementary school setting. Elementary principals, superintendents, Missouri Department of Education area supervisors and Regional Professional Development Center consultants were interviewed. Data from the National Center for Educational Statistics was used in the identification of rural high poverty schools in Missouri.

Definition

Collective Case Study Design

The design framework for the study on turnaround schools was a qualitative collective case. Creswell (2013) described case study as a qualitative methodology that can be a bounded system (case) or multiple bounded systems (cases). Case studies explore life over a length of time, through detailed, in-depth data collection, involving multiple sources of information and reporting a case description and case themes. Key to the case study is that it can be described within certain parameters, intentionally illustrate a unique case, and present an in-depth understanding through a variety of data. Case studies rely on a specific approach to data analysis and describe the case through themes or specific situations. The themes, issues or specific situations are uncovered and are organized in a specific fashion to derive meaning from the cases (Creswell, 2013).

There are various types of case studies. In a collective case study, the researcher selects one issue or concern and multiple case studies to illustrate the issue (Creswell, 2013). Yin (2014) compared the advantages and disadvantages to single case study to multiple case study, citing the main advantage being the evidence is more compelling from a multiple case study, therefore the study is more robust. Yin (2014) also compared the logic of replication in a multiple case study to the repetition of an experiment. The researcher may select several programs from several sites. Stake (2006) defined the collective or multiple case study as one that "a single case is of interest because it belongs to a particular collection of cases. The individual cases share a common characteristic or condition (p.4)." In this collective case study, I selected elementary principals of high-poverty turnaround rural schools located in Missouri, and their district superintendents. There were 66 principals who met the parameters.

Identifying Cases

According to Creswell (2013), the first step is to determine if a case study approach is appropriate. He defined this as when there are clearly identifiable cases with boundaries and the researcher seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the cases or comparison of several cases. In identifying cases, Creswell recommended selecting purposeful sampling. Yin (2014) disagreed with Creswell. Yin said referring to the cases as a "purposive sample" can raise conceptual and terminological problems. He, instead, suggested referring to the criteria with which the cases were chosen. The cases chosen for the study were principals at elementary schools that have had a 10% or more increase in assessment scores from 2009-2013 as documented on the Statewide Assessment

Performance Report. The participants for the study were elementary principals and superintendents at rural, high poverty schools in Missouri who met the criteria of increased student achievement of 10% or more between 2009-2013, classified as rural distant or rural remote, and had a FRL of 40% or more; and the consultants in the Missouri Department of Education that were relevant to the study as identified by the principals during the interviews. Initially 69 rural schools with 40% or more FRL lunch and their principals were identified based on data from Missouri Department of Secondary and Elementary Education. Published data included the 2009-2013 school years. During the study, three principals left the schools, reducing the final case pool to 66 rural schools with 40% or more FRL lunch and the elementary principals.

Data Collection

Data collection in a case study is typically extensive, drawing on multiple sources of information such as observation, interviews, documents, and audiovisual materials (Creswell, 2013). Data were collected through face-to-face principal and superintendent interviews, and telephone interviews with two Missouri Department of Education area supervisors and two Regional Professional Development Center consultants. Data regarding demographics were obtained through the Missouri Department of Education Comprehensive Data System Statewide Assessment Reports, principal interviews and the National Center for Educational Statistics School Search.

The initial invitation to participate in the study was sent via email to all of elementary principals of the identified schools (see Appendix A) and superintendents in districts with participating elementary principals (see Appendix B). Follow-up phone

calls were also made to principals and superintendents inviting them to participate in the study (see Appendices C and D) Twenty-two elementary principals responded to the interview invitation. Five of the elementary principals also served as superintendent of their schools, so a separate superintendent interview was not conducted in those instances. One superintendent participated in an interview. The purpose of the superintendent interviews was to gain further insight into the practices of the elementary school principals under the superintendent's supervision. The Missouri Department of Education consultants and Regional Professional Development Consultants relevant to the study were invited to participate in interviews (see Appendices E and F). Interview protocols were developed and used in principal, superintendent, DESE area supervisor and RPDC consultant interviews (see Appendices G, H, I and J). Interviews were recorded and transcribed by a transcriptionist. A confidentiality form was signed by the transcriptionist (see Appendix K) Table 3 contains the demographic information about the participating schools, principals, superintendents, DESE area supervisors and RPDC consultants. Pseudonyms were used to identify schools in order to maintain confidentiality.

Table 3. *School and Participant Demographic Information*

School Pseudonym	Participant Position	Participant Gender	Student Population	% FRL
Pleasant Valley Elementary	Principal/ Superintendent	Male	38	63
Rocky Top Elementary	Principal/ Superintendent	Male	50	60
Martin Elementary	Principal	Female	59	47
Junction Elementary	Principal/ Superintendent	Female	60	50
Lakeside Elementary	Principal	Male	60	98
Clemens Elementary	Principal	Male	63	54
Vista View Elementary	Principal/ Superintendent	Female	63	46
Spring Creek Elementary	Principal/ Superintendent	Male	63	59
Primary Point Elementary	Principal	Female	105	44
Hickory Grove Elementary	Principal	Female	129	49
Summerville Elementary	Principal	Male	146	62
Bookton Elementary	Principal	Female	170	40
Northwest Elementary	Principal	Male	200	47
Valley Junction Elementary	Principal	Male	241	69
Prairie Junction Elementary	Principal	Male	249	63
Main Street Elementary	Principal	Female	253	51
Songbird Elementary	Principal	Female	261	82
Collegeville Elementary	Principal	Male	288	43
Miry Creek Elementary	Principal	Male	288	51
Railton Elementary	Principal	Female	343	42
Pirate’s Cove Elementary	Principal	Male	345	48
Alcoa Elementary	Principal	Female	363	68
Valley Junction Elementary	Superintendent	Male	241	69
DESE	Area Supervisor	Male	N/A	N/A
DESE	Area Supervisor	Male	N/A	N/A
RPDC	Consultant	Female	N/A	N/A
RPDC	Consultant	Female	N/A	N/A

Interview Questions

The central question of the collective case study was, "What are the practices of turnaround principals in rural elementary settings?" The research questions were:

- What actions has the state of Missouri taken to increase student achievement?
- What contributes to the success of the schools that have increased student achievement?

The following questions were asked during the principal interviews:

- Describe your school's turnaround process. Can you tell me the story?
- What are the top three things that are most notable in the turnaround process? What makes you think of those?
- What are the unique challenges in your school's effort to increase student achievement?
- What actions has the school taken to overcome those challenges?
- What changes (in curriculum, teaching practice, organization?) were made to increase student achievement during the time frame in which you raised student achievement?
- Describe your leadership philosophy?
- What is the most important thing a principal can do to raise student achievement?
- Describe your many roles as principal?
- Of all the roles you play as principal, which is the most important in contributing to increased student achievement?

- What do you think is the most important factor in the increased student achievement scores in your school?
- Is there anything I missed that you would like to share with me?

Principal, superintendent and DESE area supervisors and RPDC consultant interview protocols are provided (see Appendices F, G, H and I).

Demographic Data

The purposes of the demographic data were to describe the basic features of the cases in the study. Data were collected from the Missouri Department of Education Comprehensive Data System Statewide Assessment Reports and the National Center for Educational Statistics.

Data Analysis

According to Creswell (2013), when multiple cases are chosen, a typical format is to first provide a within-case analysis, followed by a cross-case analysis, as well as an interpretation of the meaning of each case. The steps in analyzing data include creating and organizing files for data, when reading through texts making margin notes and initial codes, describing the case and its context identifying codes and categories, and classifying the codes and categories using themes. Creswell (2011, p. 205) listed the steps to analysis as (a) code the data, (b) assign labels, (c) groups codes into categories, and (d) interrelate categories to abstract to smaller themes. The analysis process used with the interviews in the study is shown in Figure 1.

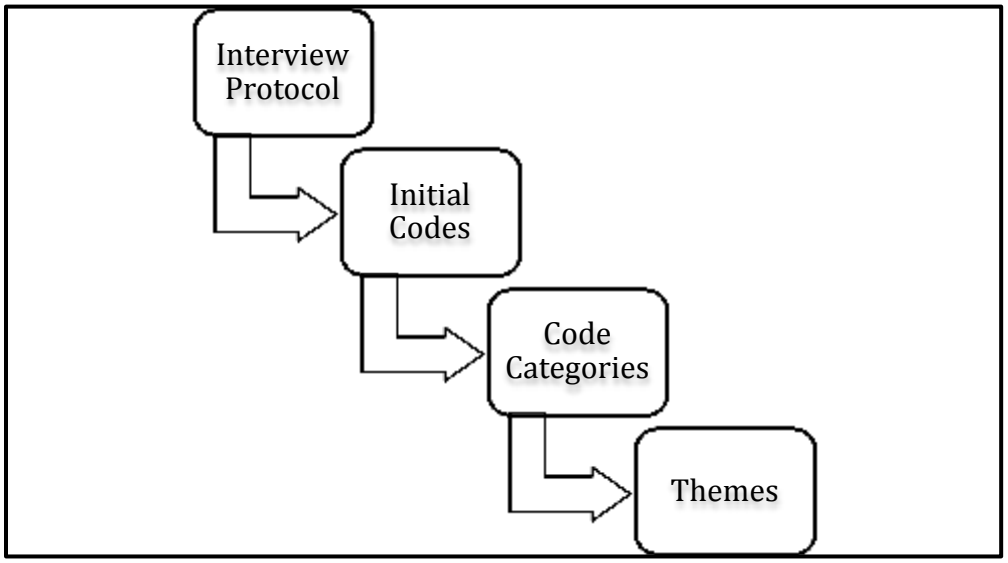

Figure 1. Interview Protocol, Initial Codes, Code Categories and Theme Development Process

The process was repeated in the analysis of the data surrounding each interview including corresponding observation notes, followed through with each theme and category. Based on the data collected through the interviews, a template was followed for analysis based on Creswell's template for coding. Data were coded by elementary principal, school and practice then used to determine themes. An in-depth picture of the cases using narrative, tables and figures was developed and is presented in Chapter Four. Demographic data is presented to describe the basic features of the participants in the study.

Validity, Reliability, and Methods of Verification

Creswell's (2013) criteria for a "good" case study are clear identification of cases, intrinsic merit, clear case description, theme identification, assertions and generalizations from the analysis and researcher self-disclosed position in the study. Clear identification

of the schools and their principals was provided through the criteria set up through the study with cases begin selected on the following criteria:

- School residing in the state of Missouri
- Location classification of rural distant or rural remote
- 40% or more Free and Reduced Lunch
- Increase of 10% or more in student achievement in Reading or Math in the Missouri Assessment Program.

Each school and principal was given a pseudonym to aid in clear identification. The principals and schools each had intrinsic merit due to the selection criteria that was met in order to be a part of the study. With the use of coding, themes were developed. Based on the common themes uncovered through the research, assertions were made regarding the practices of the principals in the study. The practices are considered best practices that apply only to this sample population of rural schools and cannot be applied to all rural schools that have high poverty rates or schools in general. The best practices serve as examples that have worked in these particular schools. The discussion of researcher bias addressed the criteria of the researcher self-disclosing her position in the study.

In further addressing the validity of the study, Stake (2010) stated, "Evidence that has been triangulated is more credible" (p.125). Evidence in this study was triangulated through member checking, and presentation of researcher observations. Member checking is providing a copy of the observation or interview to the participant for correction or comment (Stake, 2010). Following transcription of the interview tapes, the

transcripts were sent to the participants for their correction and comment (see Appendix L). Yin (2014) conveyed the strength of case study data collection when the researcher uses multiple sources of data. The analysis of the data collected through the principal, superintendent and Department of Education interviews provided the opportunity to triangulate the data and validate the themes.

Ethical Considerations

When addressing ethical issues, Creswell (2013) recommended anticipating and planning for issues that may arise in the research. The first step taken was to gain approval from the Institutional Review Board prior to beginning the study. Initial contact was via email. Protocols were developed for all contacts with the participants, which included initial email contact, appointment email, phone protocol, consent form, interview protocol, and follow-up interview protocol. Participant consent was given before conducting the interviews (see Appendix M). Creswell referred to ensuring that a power imbalance was not created when gathering data. No power imbalance occurred due to the position of the researcher who was in a like or lesser position to the interviewee's position. Participants were able to withdraw consent at any time during the process. No pre-existing relationship existed with any of the participants, which reduced the concern of coercion or undue influence.

Creswell also charged researchers to be honest and not present information in a way harmful to the participants. In all aspects of the study, including the reporting, analysis and presentation of the research, appropriate citations were used in order to avoid plagiarism. The privacy of the individual participants was respected along with

their faculties and students by not disclosing identities of persons or schools. Identities of participants, their schools and communities were protected through the use of pseudonyms in the data and reports (See Appendix J). All data was kept confidential and secure. Transcriptionists signed confidentiality agreements (See Appendix K)

Researcher Bias

In 2009 I began to attend the Comprehensive School Improvement Network meetings at the Area Education Association (AEA). In attendance at the meetings are curriculum directors, principals and associate superintendents from local private schools and public school districts within the AEA. The public school districts range in size and type from large urban to small rural. It was in these meetings that I first became aware of the concerns rural schools had with student achievement. Several of the small schools were on the SINA list due to not meeting AYP. I had thought of schools on the SINA list as schools that dealt with students from high poverty inner city areas.

Principals in the small rural schools serve in several capacities for their district such as principal and curriculum director. I am a Catholic school principal. In the state of Iowa, state accredited private and faith-based schools are treated as individual schools districts, with all of the reporting and accreditation expectations of public schools. In the Diocese of Davenport, the Catholic schools do not have a central office to provide support. I understand the challenges the rural school principals face in their various roles, which are similar to the roles I have in my position. The significant difference between my school and the rural schools is the socioeconomic status of the students. I am at a school where 20% of the students qualify for financial assistance based on 300% of

poverty, whereas one of the rural schools represented at the meetings has 75% Free and Reduced Lunch.

I student taught in a small rural town in eastern Iowa in 1983, and that experience was my first with a rural school. At that time, I found it to be very similar to the Catholic school population I had grown up with in the elementary school I attended. Learning of the poverty in rural public schools was eye opening. Movies such as *Waiting for Superman* focus attention on inner city poverty and failing public schools. It appeared to me that no one was aware of the troubles rural public schools were experiencing.

In the Fall of 2011, I attended a national awards assembly in Washington, DC. In attendance were teachers, principals and superintendents from 314 schools from across the United States who were recognized for their excellence. A portion of these schools were selected as "Exemplary Improving" based on the qualifiers that they are 40% or more free and reduced lunch and had turned around from a low performing school to a school with high student achievement. Many of the principals were very dynamic and in particular, those principals who were at turnaround schools. At that time the idea began to formulate that it would be enlightening to study the practices of turnaround school principals. If their practices could be captured and shared, it could help other schools. It was at this point that I combined the areas of high poverty; low achieving schools and successful practices in rural school leadership. A portion of the schools in attendance at the ceremony had at some point been high poverty rural schools with low achievement, and now here they were with the designation of "Exemplary Improving" schools. What was the key to their success?

The key I chose to explore was leadership. I am currently at a Catholic Preschool through 8th grade building with close to 500 students. Our school has had ongoing high state standardized test scores, is located in a small city, and has a 20% percent population on scholarship based on financial need. I have been at this school since 1990, with seven of those years as a principal. Prior to that, I was the junior high science teacher.

My beliefs were changed when as a teacher, our principal of 16 years left for a position in the public schools. His successor was not an effective leader as evidenced by the lack of forward movement of school programs and the faculty and staff decline in morale. I began attending Board of Education meetings as the faculty liaison. In the role of liaison, I was on the selection committee to hire the next principal. A young visionary principal was chosen and hired. The school quickly got back on track. Demonstrated through the succession of principals was the impact a principal has on the education of all of the students in the building. Armed with the encouragement of our new principal, I earned my Master's degree in Educational Leadership. Two years later I became principal when he took on the position of superintendent in another diocese.

I have concluded that the principal's leadership ability and style can have a positive or negative impact on a school, and therefore impacts each student in the building. When I put these various life experiences together, it drew me to the desire to learn how to improve the learning environment to enable all children to achieve academically. Rural underachieving schools with high poverty have been neglected. One key to unlocking the problem is through principal leadership.

Summary

In order to describe the practices of turnaround principals in the rural elementary school setting, a collective case study was used. The cases chosen for my study are principals at schools identified through the Missouri Department of Education Comprehensive Data System Statewide Assessment Reports and the National Center for Educational Statistics School Search. Data was triangulated and validated through the use of multiple data sources. I used elementary principal, superintendent and Missouri Department of Education Consultant interviews to obtain data.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction

The purpose of the collective case study was to examine the practices of principals in Missouri rural, high poverty, turnaround elementary schools through interviews and a survey. In the data analysis chapter, I present the data from 27 interviews I conducted with 22 principals, five of whom also served as superintendent, one superintendent, two Regional Professional Development Center consultants, and two Missouri Department of Education area supervisors. The principals were identified as practicing in rural distant or remote schools with 40% or more Free and Reduced Lunch, and state test scores increasing by 10% or more between 2009-2013. The data were gathered from the Missouri Department of Education Comprehensive Data System Statewide Assessment Reports and the National Center for Educational Statistics School Search. Superintendents were selected based on the principals interviewed. DESE area supervisors and RPDC consultants were selected based on their work with the principals who participated in the study. Table 4 provides information about position, number and gender of interviewees. Table 5 provides information about school enrollment and principal gender.

Table 4.

Position, number and gender of interviewees.

Position	Female	Male
Principal	8	9
Principal/Superintendent	2	3
Superintendent	0	1
DESE Area Supervisor	0	2
RPDC Consultant	2	0

Table 5.

School enrollment and principal gender.

Enrollment	Principal Gender		Principal/Superintendent		Superintendent	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
0-50	0	0	0	2	0	0
51-100	1	2	2	1	0	0
101-150	3	2	0	0	0	0
151-200	0	1	0	0	0	0
201-250	0	2	0	0	0	1
251-300	2	1	0	0	0	0
301-350	1	1	0	0	0	0
351-400	1	0	0	0	0	0

Research Questions

The central question of the study was, “What are the practices of turnaround principals in rural elementary settings?” The research questions were:

- What contributes to the success of the schools that have increased student achievement?
- What actions has the state of Missouri taken to increase student achievement?

Qualitative Data

Coding the Interviews

After conducting and transcribing the interviews, initial coding took place. During the initial coding phase, each case transcript was analyzed and important phrases and concepts were identified becoming the initial codes. Once all transcripts were initially coded, grouping the initial codes with common ideas led to a final code system, which became the categories for the qualitative data. When working with the categories, seven themes emerged. Codes, categories and category definitions are shown in Figure 2. Theme definitions are shown in Figure 3. The themes, categories and the number of occurrences of each category are shown in Figure 4.

Code	Category Title	Category Definition
ASMT	Assessment	Statements regarding formative, summative, standardized, and state assessments, along with the practices surrounding the assessments utilized by principals, teachers or students.
CC	Culture	Statements regarding norms, characteristics, school-wide practices, values, which are vital to the school's turnaround process.
CLB	Collaboration	Statements regarding how faculty, staff, administrators, both within and outside the school, work together, formally and informally.
CM	Curriculum	Statements regarding textbooks, Common Core, Missouri Learning Standard, vertical or horizontal curriculum alignment and other changes or adaptations to the curriculum.
COM	Local Community	Statements regarding the community as a whole including the alumni, members of the local area or investors.
DATA	Data	Statements regarding the collection, analysis and results of data use in the school by principals, teachers, students, parents and the Board of Education.
DESE	Department of Elementary and Secondary Education	Statements regarding the Missouri Department of Education programs, positions, initiatives, and policies, along with the department descriptors used to communicate the impact of those programs, positions, initiatives and policies.
FI	Finance	Statements regarding budgets, tax levy's, grant writing and other funds available for education.
FS	Faculty & Staff	Statements regarding teachers, aids, and other staff members in the building along with duties, interactions, and characteristics, associated with faculty and staff members and positions.
IL	Instructional Leadership	Statements regarding the leadership practices the principal mentioned that impact instruction in the school.
IP	Instructional Practices	Statements regarding past or changed practices or concepts related to classroom instruction.
CH	Challenges	Statements regarding challenges doe to the rural nature of the school, the poverty the students experience and overall challenges that educational institutions experience.
OP	Overcoming Poverty	Statements regarding the programs, personnel, practices and trainings to help students who have needs associated with poverty.
PA	Parents	Statements regarding information about parents.
PD	Professional Development	Statements regarding professional development topics, providers and programs, including the time, frequency and configuration of professional development.
PP	Principal Practices	Statements regarding actions taken by the principal as a part of their leadership and the improvement of student achievement.
PT	Principal Ties	Statements that describe the relationship of the principal to the community.
RO	Roles	Statements regarding the various roles they take on as principal that go beyond the usual scope of the position.
RS	Restructuring	Statements regarding the restructuring of personnel, schedules, resources, and programs such as the addition of preschool, Algebra I, or summer school.
SC	System Changes	Participants described or explicitly named changes that are part of the process of systems changes.

Figure 2. Codes, Categories and Definitions. Figure 2 includes definition of the codes, categories and their definitions as used to analyze the data.

Theme	Definition
Culture	Statements that describe norms, characteristics, school-wide practices, values, which are vital to the school turnaround process.
Leadership	Principal practices, beliefs, traits and roles that impact learning and instruction.
Curriculum and Instruction	Curriculum and instruction encompasses content, materials, methods, and how teachers acquire additional knowledge of content, and the use of materials and methods.
Systems	Systems refer to practices and changes that effect the big picture and result in long-term changes.
Challenges	Challenges present in the school due to its rural status, high poverty and general challenges present in schools and the steps principals have taken to overcome the challenges.
Stakeholders	Stakeholders refers to all people, other than students and school leaders, who are a part of the culture, have an interest in the school or impact the school.
Department of Elementary and Secondary Education	Statements regarding the Missouri Department of Education programs, positions, initiatives, and policies, along with the department descriptors used to communicate the impact of those programs, positions, initiatives and policies.

Figure 3. Theme Definitions. Figure 3 includes the themes and their definitions.

Rank	Categories	Number of Occurrences
Theme: Culture		
1	Culture ▪ Beliefs ▪ People ▪ Safety ▪ Facilities ▪ Programs	409
	Theme: Leadership	
2	Principal Practices	338
13	Instructional Leadership	87
19	Principal Traits	44
20	Principal Roles	31
Theme: Curriculum and Instruction		
3	Curriculum	196
5	Instructional Practices	164
6	Professional Development	147
7	Collaboration	140
9	Data	107
15	Assessment	74
Theme: Systems		
10	System Changes	107
12	Restructuring	102
Theme: Challenges		
8	Challenges	130
11	Overcoming Poverty	103
16	Finance and Resources	68
Theme: Stakeholders		
4	Faculty & Staff	166
17	Local Community	66
18	Parents	56
Theme: Department of Elementary and Secondary Education		
14	Department of Elementary and Secondary Education	85

Figure 4. Theme and Category Frequency. Figure 4 includes the categories and subcategories for each theme and indicates the number of occurrences of the category when coded and its rank among all of the categories for frequency.

Themes

Culture

School culture is "the heartbeat or soul of the school" (Duke, Carr & Sterrett, 2013, p. 138). Culture encompasses behaviors, beliefs, traditions, rituals, and ceremonies, which together influence the success or failure of the system. (Duke, Carr & Sterrett, 2013). When the coding of the transcripts was completed and the categories were determined, there were 409 instances referring to the culture of the school. It was the most frequent code thus it constitutes one theme from the findings. Some categories within the theme "bled" into others, as principals spoke in ways that the categories intertwined. This was true with high expectations and students first; the community and pride; and community, parents and the importance of education. Although closely related, they are distinctly separate ideas. The elements of the culture can grouped into six subcategories, beliefs, communication, people, safety, facilities and programs. The sub-categories and elements of the schools' cultures emerged from the interviews:

- Beliefs
  - high expectations
  - importance of education
  - celebrate success
  - growth mindset
  - positive environment
  - focus on learning
  - buy in
  - accountability
  - students first
  - ownership
  - pride
  - professionalism

- Communication

- People
  - teachers
  - local community
  - parents
- Safety
- Facilities
- Programs

Examples of school culture demonstrated both challenges to student achievement and changes to culture that support student achievement. Not only did the principals address culture, but the DESE Area Supervisors named this as the first and most important change that needed to occur in order for student achievement to occur. According to a DESE area supervisor who works with Focus Schools on school improvement, "…the intention the first year is to change the culture of the building at least one-fourth, and nothing much can be achieved at that level until that's done. I think that that creates the system approach, then being a sustainable approach."

One principal interviewed provided a detailed description of the importance of and change in the culture of the school when asked to describe the story of her school's turnaround process.

> I think the biggest thing has been the culture of the building. We've changed the dynamic and the attitude of staff, which in turn has changed the dynamics and attitude of the kids and parents. As you know in schools with high poverty, education is not the forefront. Education is not what they think of first when they get up in the morning and so we've tried those other needs, you know, do our Ruby Payne research and meet the

> needs of them so they can be here and ready to learn when it's time … You know, when I came to this building, it was very dark and it lacked confidence, like when you walked in you could tell that. The demeanor was very concerning, … first, when you walked in you could feel the attitude of the building so … I've spent the last two years building up trust and building those relationships with the staff and keeping the perspective like I did in my classroom as far as telling them they can, that they're good at what they do and now they're starting to believe that and that's making a big difference.

Another principal shared, "We have extremely high expectations, okay. It's a cultural thing. The one thing I'm going to tell you throughout this deal, what differentiates us from all the other schools is directly our culture."

Beliefs. When looking at the culture in the schools and the areas the principals focused on for change, several fell into a subcategory of beliefs. Beliefs are the viewpoints, attitudes and perceptions of the administration, faculty, staff, students, parents and local community.

High expectations. The topic of high expectations came up in 12 interviews. High expectations extended to all facets of the school community. Principals expressed their expectations for faculty, staff, students and parents, and referred to their perceived expectations of the teachers, parents and community. High expectations across the board were summed up by another principal, "My board and I have high expectations for our kids, my community has high expectations, my teachers have extremely high

expectations." An additional principal said, "Well I think you need to have high expectations… for students, and for teachers as well. I think that says enough probably."

Importance of education. The need to change the perception of the importance of education is part of the culture change needed for a successful turnaround. This topic came up as a challenge in the schools as well. Six principals addressed the need to elevate the importance of education, with one applying what she observes at her school to a wider scope,

> I don't think this is just unique to my school, I think we have culture issues in our society. Now, where to a certain percent of the population education is not important, and so we try to instill in kids you know, why it's important, and a love of learning, and to help them understand why it's so important that they do stay involved in school, and that they do engage when they are here.

The culture, specifically the importance of education, is affected by the problems associated with high poverty in the schools and the need for the students to fish, trap and hunt to have food on the table. Three principals provided anecdotal stories regarding the priority hunting and fishing have over school. One principal, in particular, spoke about how she had to change her perspective and understand the culture. She is working to help change the students' priorities as well. "…You need to be here during hunting season. I'll talk to the kids. I make a big deal out of what they caught, what they killed … what they are proud of…"

A principal referred to the problems with the importance of education on a generational level. “We still have grandparents that didn’t finish school. We still have parents that didn’t finish school; so, they don’t put a whole lot of emphasis on education. We fight that some.“

Celebrate success. A subcategory that brought smiles to the faces of the principals, as they shared their school’s turnaround story, involved the celebration of success and the importance of celebrations. Six principals shared in greater detail their celebrations surrounding not only students who score proficient on assessments, but also those who show improvement. The principals have celebrations unique to their school cultures. Celebrations included a Wall of Fame, trips to Silver Dollar City amusement park, bike giveaways, a lock-in at the school, weekly celebration assemblies, inviting parents and grandparents to awards assemblies that included a red carpet, prizes, and communication with the parents and community about their improvements in student achievement. The students at one school announced those who received Tiger of the Week over the PA system and they “hoot and holler.” Principals demonstrated the many lengths they would go to, to motivate a student. A second grade student was motivated to do a Math packet by her principal. “They were talking about somersaults or something when I was in there. I said, ‘If you’ll do your work next week, I’ll do a somersault.’” The student did her work and, in an all-school assembly, the principal did his somersault. The results of the somersault reached beyond the second grade student. “They’re still talking about it, and that was five months ago. I mean it was the biggest thing. You would think that the president had come.”

Growth Mindset. A focus on improvement and the ability for all schools, teachers and students to improve is a growth mindset. A change from a fixed to a growth mindset, for both teachers and students, is the understanding that improvement is the goal. A principal expressed the change in her faculty in this way, "So it changed the growth mindset versus the fixed mindset and we've had a lot of discussion about that so, I think everything can be dealt with in a positive way…" A principal and her faculty recognized two students from each grade every month, an outstanding student and an improved student. Another principal and his faculty rewarded improvement as well. This practice helped the students to develop a growth mindset. "If they show measured improvement, it's just as good to me as proficient or advanced…So, that gives everybody a feeling that if I try hard and I improve, it's not going to go unnoticed."

Positive environment.

> I need to give them a good environment for everybody to learn in. This is just being a teacher, a little bit, coming out in me I guess. I know that that kid has his rights, but I've got 15 other kids over here, who have the right to a good education not to be messed up by one kid. Nobody has that power. That's my responsibility to clean that up.

One principal shared the importance of a good learning environment and his responsibility in ensuring this for his students. Three principals also discussed the need for a positive learning environment, and one extended a positive environment to the ability to keep staff when a nearby district may pay higher, "I think if you can create an environment where you've got a, a positive team

atmosphere, then… you know a few thousand dollars to change districts, isn't nearly as… appealing." Celebrations of learning, the Positive Behavior Supports (PBS) program, collaboration, and ensuring emotional safety for the students and staff were expressions of a positive environment.

Focus on learning. Focus on learning was a frequent topic in not only the principal interviews, but also in the superintendent, Department of Education Area Supervisors and Regional Professional Development Consultants interviews. Principals spoke of student and teacher learning. Teachers participated in professional development provided by outside consultants and organizations, as well as shared their learning with each other. The focus on student learning resulted in eight schools reorganizing schedules and programs to gain more instructional time, along with intangibles that put the focus on learning. A principal expressed the changed teacher culture in her school,

> I would say a renewed focus on student learning and believing and building up my teachers so they believe in themselves…Because if you're torn down and you're discouraged and you're told you're no good and that you can't teach yourself out of a paper box, then you're not going to meet the standard.

Another principal described setting the tone for bell-to-bell instruction, "we don't show movies for fun." The principal of another school noted a focus on learning as "… not wavering from that, allowing other things to come in and distract us from what you know, the focus is on learning." A superintendent described the focus on student learning,

by helping teachers learn. “I tell you, I think the key to improving student learning is to help teach the teachers.”

Buy in. A term used by the administrators was “buy-in” in reference to teachers, students, parents and Boards of Education supporting curriculum, programs, instructional practices, assessments and changes to the culture of the school. One principal shared a story that demonstrated how he and the faculty knew the students had begun to buy into the changes taking place at the school.

> You know, we started on Fridays. We would all wear black shirts and call it “Black Friday,” so we’d all look the same. It didn’t take but two or three times. The kids were like, “Hey you guys are all dressed the same!” “Yep, because we’re on a team.” The next thing I know, I got kids wearing black on Friday. It’s just stuff like that that gives them that buy in, but it was just changing the attitude and getting everybody to buy into the fact that what we’re doing is important, and we’re not going to accept less than your best. If your best is a “C”, I’m okay with that, but it’s going to be your best.

Another principal spoke of the buy in of her faculty,

> They could have just rolled over and said, “you know what, I’m not going to do it,” and they didn’t. They bought in. They did the work. I think those answers are based on what the consensus has been around us, what has made a difference in the way we have school.

Two principals referred to having 100% buy in which included teachers, students, parents and the community. One reported how by changing Parent-Teacher conferences to Parent-Teacher-Student conferences, with students setting their own learning goals and sharing them with their parents, they have created buy in at their school. Twelve of the principals spoke of the importance of creating buy in when changing the culture of the school.

Accountability. Similar to high expectations was holding students and teachers accountable. Four of the principals addressed accountability in school culture. One principal spoke of accountability for grade levels in which standardized tests were not given, Preschool through 2nd grade, and the responsibility of teachers to track student learning. Another principal spoke of accountability on a broader scale, "I think we need rigorous standards, and I think we need to hold kids and teachers to those." In comments on accountability, the statements reflected ensuring that the students and the teachers were meeting the goals and objectives.

Students first. Putting students first was an expectation of the administration, faculty and staff. "Students first" was the philosophy in the school that emphasized what was best for the students academically, socially, emotionally and physically when implementing programs and curriculum. This included celebrations that occurred in the schools as well. One principal referred to teachers when she said, "If they come in to vent, or knowing that I'm here to find ways to help, and that we're both here for our kids, for these kids… I call them my kids, because they're all mine, all 154 of them." Another principal talked about a "narrow focus." For him, the focus was "What is it that's gonna

help our kids?" Other statements made by principals included, "students first is always what we strive for" and "we want what's best for kids." One principal described the school environment as a strong one where "everybody looks out for what's important for the kids." Each principal had an example of how they put the students first through their daily routines, in resource allocation and in the day-to-day decisions in the school.

Ownership. In their stories about ownership, principals mainly referred to the students and teachers. Six of the principals described various aspects of ownership. One principal referred to teacher ownership in his report of the results oriented culture at his school. He said, "I don't really care how we get there, as long as we're moving in the right direction. And I think that has given our teachers some ownership in their practices." Another principal described a program in which all faculty and staff worked with various groups of students during Tiger Time, building ownership of the education of all students. Tiger Time is differentiated instruction time determined by their Response to Intervention (RTI) program.

Pride. In all of the schools I visited, pride was evident. All of the principals indicated pride in their schools, teachers, programs, students and academic achievements. Teachers, principals and staff often wore apparel that displayed the school logo and school colors. School mascots were displayed inside and outside the buildings. As principals gave tours of their buildings, they pointed out sources of pride ranging from new gymnasiums, murals on the walls, a Wall of Fame, and past awards, to new technology in the building. Pride was a prominent aspect of the current school culture. Based on principals' stories, in some schools this was not always the case. In these

instances, the principal and faculty worked to restore school pride. Other schools never lost their sense of pride. In one school, since the principal was hired in 2000, the school had never lost its sense of pride, even though test scores were down. He stated,

> It has a strong pride factor in the community, sometimes detrimental. It's considered a premier community to raise your kids and live in, even though it's not economically thriving. The school system is considered in this local area to be, to be the best. And that's really because it's been successful. It's been successful in athletics, fine arts People don't ever want to talk about that either. You know, those two things assimilate to most people as being academically successful as well. I'll take you on a little tour there at the end. Every academic or district achievement we can win, we've won, for the state a Missouri. It used to be called Accredited with Distinction in Missouri.

Professionalism. One principal spoke about teachers' professionalism comparing their behavior to doctors. She noted the extra mile teachers go to in order to meet with parents outside of the regular work day in order to do what is best for the students. One principal reported, "They care about the kids… they're professional in their approach too. They don't want to just simply be here and draw a paycheck… Even though it's not a great check… you get out of it what you put into it." He addressed how he treats teachers, "We've got a positive environment and… our teachers are treated with respect, and as professionals." He described how, as a staff, they shared professional and personal

celebrations at the start of all of their meetings. This was one way they kept things positive.

Communication. Communication with all levels of stakeholders was a common category of culture. Fourteen (64%) principals specifically addressed communication during the interviews. Communication was essential for changing the culture of the school. One principal held community meetings to report student successes in order help get a tax levy passed. Another principal reported communication to the faculty on a weekly basis, as well as parent communication, which helped change the culture. A third principal spoke of the importance of communication, "I think anytime that you're able to communicate and validate, and develop trust, those things guide you."

People. As principals described the culture of the school, three groups of individuals were the focus: teachers, local community and parents.

Teachers. Changing the culture began with the teachers. One principal addressed the change in her faculty.

> I know when I came, morale was very low and teachers felt threatened. They didn't feel like they were valued, and I think that trickles down to students. Because if they are made to feel that way then students will feel that way, it's going to rub off. I have the greatest staff in the world. I can't say that a lot of staff has turned over, but just the way we've looked and changed the culture together has really been the turnaround.

Another principal noted building a collaborative environment played a role in changing the culture of the school. She stated, "Of course we try to create a culture and climate

that makes people want to stay … building that collaborative environment, I think, is key as far as teacher turnover and the training [are concerned]." One principal talked about the importance of empowering the teachers throughout the interview. Two principals were concerned one teacher can make a positive or negative impact on the rest of the faculty.

Local community. In small rural towns, the school may be the social hub of the community. The culture of both may be reciprocal. Community pride was a tool one principal used. He described reciprocity between the school and community,

> I think what I found to be true is that these small towns in Northwest Missouri, they know that the lifeblood of the town is the school. And if the school fails, or if the school struggles, the whole community will suffer. You don't have to drive very far from where we're at, and you can go through a town and you can see… what used to be a town, and a school that's now empty.

A principal explained the reason behind the close tie between school success and community. "But the community pride, this is all they got. They don't have anything else. It's the only show in town. There's only one church, I mean there's ten houses, this is it." As I drove through the communities, the principal's observation was true for the schools and communities involved in the study.

One small town pulled together to increase the tax levy, rather than let their school close. The school was a K-8 building and had a new gymnasium addition. The superintendent, who also was the principal, gave me a tour of the school. He showed me

the improvements made to the building with the help of tax levies. The town's population has shrunk. The town lost its post office, yet they maintained a school. The day I was there, the people of the town were invited to the school for a Thanksgiving lunch.

Another principal expressed the connection between the school and community, "We are the hub of the community so the building is used nonstop. So they associate the school, and this is good and bad, the school is the community."

Parents. Seventeen of the principals spoke of the parents. A principal said they invite parents and roll out a red carpet to celebrate student success. Another principal addressed the parents' acceptance of their new grading system. "We thought we'd have a lot of blowback from parents about that, but it's okay, if that's what you're doing." One principal told a story of a disagreement with a parent over participating in Tier Interventions, academic interventions based on formative assessment data.

> I had a mom here a few years ago. I still do not understand why. Her daughter… tested yellow in our Dibbles at the beginning of the year. We sent home the information saying that your daughter will be participating in Tier. She didn't want her doing that…short of it is, we almost got into a knockdown drag out in here, because… this is how we do it here. This is just part of our culture. This is what we do.

One principal referred to the ease of communication in a small town.

> The kids know that they're not going to be able to go home and hide because Mom… is… going to hear from her teacher via phone, text message, Facebook, whatever. Meet her at the grocery store. There's no

> place to hide. So you're going have to get your stuff done. You have to do your best.

Safety. Safety was addressed in two contexts. The first context was the physical safety of the school building and students' home lives. The second context was emotional safety that encompassed students both at home and at school, as well as the teachers, who needed to feel safe and supported in their jobs.

Physical safety. The majority of the schools I visited for the principal interviews had security systems that locked the school doors at all times. Six principals described the physical safety issues for the school buildings. One principal reported the changes he made to the school building to improve safety. He described why the changes were necessary.

> I mean even if I call the police, the closest law enforcement is either in New Lake Town, which is 22 miles, or North Tampa, which is 25 miles. So we are pretty much going to take care of ourselves. If you know the history of, which I'm sure you do, of school shootings, they are usually over in four minutes. So there's not a lot of hope that we … so we've tried to do some things.

Another principal spoke about the time it takes for law enforcement to arrive at the school and the need for extra precautions to keep the school safe. One principal mentioned bullying. The context was in reference to a report he had to complete. However, he had no concerns about bullying in the school.

Positive behavior supports. One of the programs used to foster a safe and productive learning environment is Positive Behavior Supports (PBS). Eight of the principals reported implementing the program. PBS focuses on teaching students appropriate behavior in the classroom in order to create a better learning environment for all students. One principal spoke extensively about the program, which also has been implemented at seven other schools.

Emotional safety. The issue of emotional safety pertained to both students and staff. One principal spoke of the importance of creating a safe learning atmosphere.

> Create a safe, healthy… and an inviting atmosphere. I don't think anybody can ever learn, or be at ease and focus on anything, if they don't feel safe, if they don't feel valued, which has zero to do with any kind of academic curriculum, lesson planning that you can think of.

Teachers must feel emotionally safe in order to implement new curriculum and take risks in their teaching. A principal said, "I try to create an environment where it's okay to take risks and try new things, and that's encouraged." Along with feeling safe to take instructional risks, 15 of the 22 principals expressed the need to support their teachers whether with student discipline, instructional decisions, sharing ideas, or asking for advice about performing their job.

Facilities. Principals demonstrated how the physical state of the building impacts the culture. I was given a tour of 14 of the school facilities. During the tours, improvements to the facilities were pointed out. One principal noted how the improvements to the building equated with pride.

> I've taken care of the building first of all. We've painted, we've done the lighting, we've updated quite a bit, decorated. The physical appearance is much better. So people see that and they see, especially the guys, that you are taking care of it and that you have pride in the building.

Another principal described the updating the building and what it was like prior to the renovations and maintenance. "When I got here, this place made me think of an old nursing home. I mean, there was no effort to maintain or anything like that." An additional principal equated improving the look of the building with the culture.

Programs. Thirteen principals described new programs, which facilitated the schools' culture change. Programs ranged from addressing the direct effects of poverty, a Backpack Buddy program, the addition of preschool, behavior incentive programs, and tutoring programs. A principal at a K-12 building mentioned a program they established for older students that exposes them to possibilities outside their area,

> The ultimate challenge here is to get the kids to believe there is more to life than Lake County. We got kids here who never leave Lake County. We're taking a group of kids this year to go to Dolphin Island for a Scientific Research Study in October for a week…I've got three of them that have never been any further than Lake City… They have been to two counties, three counties, River County, Hill County, Lake County.

Summary of culture. Changing the culture of the school for students, staff and community is the most important step in school improvement. Principals, superintendents, Department of Education Area Supervisors, and Regional Professional Development Center consultants agreed on the necessity of a drastic culture change. One principal gave voice to a common thread in the culture of the schools I visited. "I think a lot of it is that we're a big family. I mean it's the community feeling that there is around here. The kids know that they're part of something important." Table 6 provides a summary of the elements included in theme one, culture.

Table 6.

Elements of Culture

Beliefs	Beliefs encompass the viewpoints, attitudes and perceptions of the administration, faculty, staff, students, parents and local community in the areas of high expectations, the importance of education, celebrating success, growth mindset, positive environment, focus on learning, buy in, accountability, students first, ownership, pride and professionalism
Communication	Communication was frequent and included teachers, parents and the local community.
People	Teachers, local community, and parents comprised the groups of people that were essential to the culture change of the school.
Safety	Safety included three elements, physical safety, the Positive Behavior Supports Program and the emotional safety of the students and teachers.
Facilities	Changing the physical state of the school facilities impacted the culture of the school. Physical plant improvements resulted in an increase in pride.
Programs	Programs which addressed the effects of poverty on education impacted the culture change.

CHAPTER 5

LEADERSHIP

Introduction

Principal practices, beliefs, traits and roles that impact learning and instruction are categorized under the theme of leadership. The categories were integral parts of the necessary components of their positions, and the intangible components of who they were and how they lead. The categories of the theme of leadership were principal practices, instructional leadership, principal traits and roles.

Principal Practices

Principal practices are defined in the study as actions taken by the principal as a part of their leadership and the improvement of student achievement. The principals interviewed had various ways to describe the key practices of support, collaboration, visibility, communication, shared leadership, focus, hiring, vision and data use. Three descriptions dominated the principals' comments: support, build and find.

Support

The word support was used 45 times throughout the interviews by the principals. The practices indicated support as well, without specifically using the word "support." Principals talked about support in terms of their teachers and the students. A principal stated,

> I try to give teachers the tools they need to be successful. I don't have all the answers; but, I try to find resources for them. I try to put best practices in front of them. I try to know and understand what's working for other

> schools so that we can do that. My door is always open. We have a very comfortable relationship here. So I feel like the teachers can come to me with problems and issues. We work together as a team. I do value their input.

Phrases concerning teacher support included: "reinforce and build them up, give direction and drive, empowerment, give them the tools, being able to voice concerns, and helps you feed your people." Providing teachers with support and communicating that support was a strong common theme.

A principal shared her philosophy that translates into practice, "'High expectations must come with high support. So you can't just expect all these great things if you are not willing to put the support in."

One principal described student support,

> We spend a lot of time investigating and figuring out what this kid's currency will be. Every kid has them and we just got to figure out what it is. Most of our kids that are on behavior plans come down to spend game time with me and the counselor. They're looking for attention. They're looking for love. They're looking for a hug. They're looking for someone to spend some attention with them. We offer them iPADS, computers, all of that. They don't want any of that. They want to sit and play a game with us. Or our coach, he's very, he's a hot commodity too. So, it's kind of everybody works together to make this one kid successful.

A principal said he meets each student at the door everyday. This helps him to know children individually. It lets the students know they matter.

Another principal came to the school close to retirement. He said, “I could have rode my time out at [my previous school], retired.” Instead, he wanted to make a difference for students. “I just told them all from day one, I care about kids. I don’t have to be here.” Each principal had a story about the support they gave to their teachers and students.

Build

The term “build” was used in many ways to describe practices. “Build” was used in reference to relationships, trust, faculty, and the physical plant. Seven principals used the phrase “build relationships.” Building trust, a foundation, morale, consensus, leaders, and building up a staff, were ways principals described how they built the schools.

One principal reported his practice of “building a building,” which expressed the practices the principals used within their buildings,

> I think in that team atmosphere, letting them know that no, this isn’t about you or me, this is about you and me and everybody else. I told the Board I want to hire my janitors; and, I want to hire my cooks. I’m building a building and I need people to fit. So, the janitors needed to know how to notice a kid that was down and ask them if they might want to help them clean up something. I think the biggest thing for me to turn this whole thing around was to make people understand that we’re all in this battle together. Either we all win or we all lose, and understand that if we lose,

> it's not only those kids' future, it's your future. If these kids aren't working, your social security and your retirement goes out the window too.

Find

The fourth term used was "find." The principals found resources, answers, solutions, teachers, and the right people. Although they may not specifically have used the word "find," the nine principals who talked about hiring and the importance of hiring the right people implied it.

When talking about building a building, one principal addressed the importance of hiring in the process. Another principal reported "hiring the best," because that is what it takes to build the culture of a school.

One principal praised his middle school science and math teacher. He described how difficult it can be to find a teacher who meets the "highly qualified" standards. "But we're just very fortunate, we've got somebody in here who has the certification on the high school level to be able to teach the middle school science and middle school math." Another principal described her practices,

> Trying to instill that desire and of course to hire the very, very best people, that's a huge responsibility that a principal has and if they're not the very best to make them the best or get rid of them.

"Find" was used to address resources. Principals commented on the importance of being creative in finding all types of resources in order for teachers to be successful. A principal spoke of needing to be creative in how they got resources,

> We have to be creative too. For instance that is something I will be working on this afternoon. We got an email last year about the time school started from AMES WEB, which is Pearson, to help out with some field testing. In turn, we could get some free devices. I talked to my Title 1 teacher and we did [the field test]. They kept asking us, throughout the year, since you are already helping with this, can you also help us out in these grades. We ended up with 7 iPads; two of them are here, waiting to go the TECH office to get processed. I just got an email from them the other day wanting more help. Plus it gives us an opportunity, because they are dong some cool things. They are going to be doing online assessments and that is the way we are going.

Three principals said the various grants they have received help provide needed resources. Principals in small rural districts may fulfill the role of superintendent as well. When this is the case, they have the ability to utilize financial resources in a way that fits their practices. One administrator in the principal/superintendent role said,

> We had an administrator, a previous administrator, who liked to squirrel away a lot of money. No raises, no, no… things to do the job with. We don't need 3 quarters of a million dollars in the bank sitting there, getting 1% interest, or a half a percent interest, or whatever it may be. We need to put that money into circulation and do somethin' with it. So I think I give 'em the tools to do it with.

Additional practices

In addition to support, build and find, principals addressed other practices. These included: visibility, focus, communication, collaboration, data use, and leading by example.

Whether it is through "walk-throughs," observing classrooms, greeting students at the doorway or at community events, all of the principals described the importance of visibility. One principal used classroom visits to provoke reflection by teachers, "… just trying to be visible, being in the classroom. Have communication with the staff, ask them some thought provoking questions about you know, this is what I saw in class or how did that end up when I walked out?"

One principal visited every classroom daily. She reported trying to do one or two walk-through evaluations each day as well. Another principal was visible in the hall, stopped in classrooms two or three times daily, and ate lunch with the teachers. A principal reported that he enjoyed being in the classroom, especially the Kindergarten. He was able to observe the students' vocabulary acquisition and "phonics dance". Another principal stated, "I'm very religious of trying to… walk by rooms, poke my head in rooms."

Sixteen of the principals referred to focus during the interviews. Although the area of focus varied by school, its importance for principals as they steered the school's achievement around was consistent. In one principal's school, the focus for the year was on improving the data team process. At another school the focus was on student engagement. When one principal conducted her walk-throughs, student engagement was

the area she concentrated on. Another principal and his faculty focused on Professional Learning Communities. He described the changes they were making in order to facilitate the implementation of Professional Learning Communities. He commented,

> …from rearranging our schedule to make sure that they had common planning time and had time built into their day to meet with their colleagues and discuss what was happening in their classrooms and look at data…and tryin' to make sure that from one 3rd grade classroom to the next 3rd grade classroom, that they had the same set of expectations and the same learning objectives.

Thirteen principals addressed the topic of communication in their practices. Communication practices included teachers, students, parents and the community. Practices that came hand-in-hand with communication were having an open door and listening. One principal expressed the importance of having an open door, "My door is always open to help teachers, and sometimes people say that it is the biggest waste of time. I think that relationships are the biggest asset that you can have in a school district…"

Another principal expressed it this way, "I think you gotta be compassionate, and a good listener, and a change agent. And have compassion more for the teacher as a person. I'm a people person. My door is always open. My leadership is collaborative."

Collaboration was an aspect of the change in the school culture. For twelve principals, collaboration has become part of their practices. A principal said,

> Valuing collaboration, empowering leaders… there are a lot of people; it isn't always the loudest person in the room who is the leader. I think if I'm good at anything, I'm good at recognizing people's strengths and playing to those strengths. So, I think that collaborative process, which is very PLCish, [and] has allowed us to make huge changes in a short amount of time [has been helpful]. Had it been top down, it never would have worked.

Collaboration not only occurred within the school for academics through the use of Professional Learning Communities or Data Teams, but principals described how they collaborated with other administrators and in other circumstances. Some spoke about MoLead, a leadership academy for focus school principals, that after attending, provided them with a network. Collaboration occurred in areas beyond academics. One principal collaborated with the district down the road when deciding whether to cancel school for bad weather. Another principal related incidents when there was too much work for one person; and, the faculty pulled together to help out. The example she used was a safety plan, where everyone jumped in and helped out. One principal and his faculty solved a discipline problem through collaboration. "And so the teachers and I, we sat down, we put our heads together, and we agreed that a Saturday school…we'd create a Saturday school."

An increase in the use of data occurred due to various driving forces for the schools. Eighteen principals spoke about how they used data and its importance, especially for schools categorized by the state as focus schools. A principal shared, not

only how their Department of Education consultant helped them with data, but also with their daily use of data and their data teams. Regarding the data teams, she said,

> Each teacher takes turns bringing in data from their classrooms. We have a chart that shows: who is proficient; close to, not ever going to make it. It is a good opportunity for them to get some ideas and instructional strategies from each other. It is a good way for me to see, "Wow, Johnny is struggling," and I thought he would be. It is also a good vertical. It works well for us because it is vertical as well and I think that is so important.

A principal stated that the data was a driving force in helping them build capacity. Another principal addressed finding appropriate data not only with academic areas, but also with their Positive Behavior reports.

Lead by example, walk the walk, and set an example, were a few of the phrases principals used to describe their leadership practices. Seven of the principals spoke of how they put this philosophy into practice. One principal expressed it in this way,

> …I think you don't ever ask anyone to do anything that you're not willing to do yourself. If they see you working hard, they're more likely to work hard. If they see me leave here at 3:30, everyday, that doesn't set a good example for your staff.

Summary of Principal Practices

Principal Practices in the code categories were statements regarding actions taken by principals as part of their leadership and their efforts to improve student achievement.

Certain key practices, according to the principals, played a vital role in the improvement of student achievement. Providing support for teachers and students, increasing collaboration and the use of data worked interdependently to provide the changes needed to turn a school around.

Instructional Leadership

Each principal addressed instructional leadership during the interviews. In response to the question about the most important role they had as principal, 15 replied "instructional leader." A principal described it as being the lead learner, the encourager, and having a feel for how the kids are doing. They needed to know who is struggling, and why they are struggling. In their role as instructional leader, principals provided professional development for the staff and attended the professional development activity as well. Working with curriculum, assessment, intervention, state standards, teacher evaluation, and data were all aspects of instructional leadership reported by the principals. A common practice of the principals in their role as instructional leaders was indicated by a principal, "I am in every classroom daily, but not with my IPAD evaluating." She talked about the new Missouri teacher evaluation piece and the classroom observations tied to the new system.

Principal Traits

As I interviewed the Missouri principals, there were traits that kept rising to the surface. This was an unintended, but interesting finding. The first trait I noticed was that many of the principals, when telling the story of the school's turnaround, mentioned their personal commitment to the school because they were from the area. Seven principals

were from the area where they were principals. Some were alumni of the schools where they worked. Although one principal was not from area, her husband was. One principal chose to work in a small town like the one where he grew up. He wanted his children to have the experience of putting up hay in the summer. Another principal grew up in a similar community. According to her, you could "flip flop schools." The principals who have school-aged children, all have their children enrolled in the schools they lead. One principal noted that if she was not willing to put her children in the school, it sent a message to the community that the school was not good enough for her children. Her children attending the school, makes the turnaround process and student achievement a personal win for her family. The trait the principals demonstrated was a personal connection to the school, and they, too, were community stakeholders. One principal commented on his passion for rural schools.

> My whole life has been part of this school. I'm realizing that in order to keep our little schools open, we're going to have to do some advocation for that. So, I'm trying, that's not my personality but I realize the necessity of it. So I'm going to try to kind of fulfill that into the responsibilities.

Having a 6th grade daughter at the school, being an alumnus, and living in the town were reasons one principal felt he was hired for the position. The Board of Education knew he was committed to the school and the community. He felt this made communication with families easier. Another principal talked about being a member of the community. "I mean every time I go to the grocery store, I see parents I know. And

most of the time they wanna talk about their kids. Every time I go to church. Wherever. Dollar General. Casey's."

Student focus was another trait of the principals. "What's best for kids." was a mantra for the principals interviewed. Teacher needs were discussed only in terms of how a purchase, program, or schedule change the teachers requested, positively effected students and improved student learning.

Principals prided themselves on a wise use of resources and being creative in finding resources to improve the schools. Wise use of resources came in the form of restructuring personnel, reconfiguring schedules, writing grants, holding fundraisers, community business partnerships, and asking the community to increase tax levies. The principals described the ways they worked to get the needed resources for their students and teachers thus enabling them to be successful.

Flexibility was another trait the principals spoke of, especially when working with teachers. The principals in the study provided anecdotes about the need to assess situations and change courses of action, or work with teachers differently to achieve the necessary outcomes. One principal stated her philosophy for working with a traditional teacher who was struggling to make needed changes to increase student learning.

> Just try to support them. The [teacher] that is most traditional, I have just a really good, friendly relationship with and I just try to encourage her and assist her. Let's sit down together and we'll figure this out. Give them time; this doesn't have to be finished by the end of the week. Try to push, but not too hard, with support.

The final trait that surfaced during the interviews was the vision each principal had for the school. Eight of the principals spoke about vision. A principal talked about his vision and goals for the culture of the school, making it a collaborative environment. He addressed the importance of empowering the teachers to be a part of the vision. Another principal expressed the importance of a unified vision, being on the same page and having a positive team atmosphere. He said his most important role in the school was as the "vision caster". The importance of being a visionary leader in the school was important to the turnaround in the schools led by five of the principals.

Principal Roles

In a rural small school setting, principals take on various roles that go beyond the usual scope of the position in larger urban and suburban districts. Principals listed instructional roles including classroom teacher, testing coordinator, technology coordinator, mentor, mediator, curriculum director, and special education director. Principals who wore both the principal and superintendent hats added to the list the finance and Board of Education roles they held. Whether a district in and of itself or part of a small rural district, non-instructional roles the principals assumed were human resources, custodian, bookkeeper, homeless coordinator, coach, federal programs coordinator, community liaison, bus driver, safety coordinator, parent teacher organization liaison, finance, nurse, and cafeteria worker. One principal referred to himself as the highest paid custodian in the district. Another principal provided an overall assessment of what it takes to be a small, rural school principal.

> Here, I'm the instructional leader, the disciplinarian, the HR person, the technology person, the curriculum person. Little schools, you do it all. You wear lots of hats. I'm not the technology director, but have been. And I also coach. I coach two sports. And so, you just wear lots of hats. And you've got to be high energy. And if you're not, you better find a way to be it.

Summary of Leadership

In the theme of leadership, the principals' ability to lead included the following components: principal practices, beliefs, traits and roles. Their leadership also consisted of the components of their positions, who they were as people, and their life experiences. Table 7 summarizes the elements of the second theme, leadership.

Table 7.

Elements of Leadership

Principal Practices	Three concepts dominated principal practices, support, find and build. Additional practices included visibility, focus, communication, collaboration, data use, and leading by example.
Instructional Leadership	Principals reported instructional leadership as their most important role. The role of instructional leader included knowledge of individual student achievement data, participation in professional development, working with curriculum, assessment, interventions, data, and teacher evaluations.
Principal Traits	Personal commitment to rural schools, and often their school in particular, due to various personal circumstances was reported. Resourcefulness and wise use of resources was reported, as well as flexibility, and vision.
Principal Roles	Principals took on roles often separated out in larger school districts. In the study instructional roles included, technology coordinator, classroom teacher, curriculum director, and special education coordinator. Non-instructional roles included human resources, federal programs, bookkeeper, custodian, bus driver, community liaison, homeless coordinator, and coach.

CHAPTER 6

CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

Introduction

Curriculum and instruction are often seen as separate components of education that impact student learning. Curriculum and Instruction encompasses content, materials, methods, and how teachers acquire additional knowledge of content, and the use of materials and methods. Curriculum, instructional practices, professional development, collaboration, data and assessment are presented in this section.

Curriculum

Changes to curriculum took on various formats including adopting new textbooks, aligning to standards, vertical and horizontal alignment of curriculum within the schools, a common curriculum and rewriting curriculum as a district. A conversation that occurred in the discussion of curriculum was the importance of consistency at grade levels. Whether schools adopted new textbooks, aligned curriculum, adopted Common Core or rewrote curriculum, the common thread was the importance of a consistency within and across grade levels. A principal described the shift in curriculum at his school.

> Probably the attention to the detail of what we're teaching and assessing. Whereas before, it was individual. I have 15 teachers, and— classroom teachers, so we [had] 15 curricula. We've worked a lot on virtually aligning things, scope and sequence kind a things in English, Language Arts, and Math. So that attention to the… Marzano calls it the Guaranteed Bible Curriculum.

Instructional Practices

Changes in instructional practices occurred in all schools, particularly in the areas of reading, math and the use of technology. Common changes included RTI, differentiated instruction, John Hattie's work, the use of data and restructuring the schedule to gain more instructional time. Instructional practices came about through work with Regional Professional Development Center consultants and other professional development opportunities. One school's story was common. "So we've worked with [our consultant] from RPDC on effective instructional practices for communication arts, data teaming, those things and then we're working with [a consultant] from a different RPDC currently on the Math strategies, best practices, she's observed our teachers…."

A principal described how his teachers used SMART Boards to engage students. Principals addressed how they added instructional time. One principal noted the benefit of the small size of the school when talking about individualized instruction,

> …because we are so small, that we can individualize instruction for practically every kid. So if somebody is having an issue, we can concentrate, we can get the Title teacher, we can get the Special Ed teacher, we can get the classroom teacher, we all get together and figure out something for this kid.

One principal addressed the configuration of instruction, "We can teach a math lesson and then pull a small group back to do… re-teaching or, or whatever."

Another focus was on student engagement. Teachers in one school had studied Richard DuFour, John Hattie and cooperative learning in order to increase student

engagement. Two of the principals addressed RTI and Differentiated Instruction, with one adding John Hattie's work. Fluid groups and interventions were key at one school. At another school, Tiger Time was a key 30-minute, school-wide, intervention time. Kagan structures to engage students in learning came were cited by two principals. The common topics on instructional practices were the use of interventions, differentiation, increasing instructional time and student engagement.

Professional Development

The changes to instructional practices cannot happen without professional development. In all 22 schools, professional development was part of the turnaround process. The change in quality was essential at one school.

> You know, back in the day when I started here, we didn't have professional development. Professional development was the in-service you had before school started when you talked about health insurance at a faculty meeting. I mean that's what it was; but, we've learned that we have to be learners everyday. And the beauty about this school is even my teachers that have been here and are on the verge of retirement, they still consider themselves learners. So, they're still changing their ways to meet the needs. Society is changing. Every year it changes and so we have to get better at meeting their needs.

Additional aspects of professional development included attendance at DuFour's workshops on Professional Learning Communities, work with Regional Professional Development Centers, collaboration within the school and with other schools, and

making professional development a priority. The Regional Professional Development Centers appeared to be the impetus for change in the schools. One principal reinforced this in her statement,

> The Northwest Regional Professional Development Center, I keep plugging them; but I mean, they are just near and dear to my heart because they are my instructional leaders. And so they keep pushing me forward and they can research the best practices you know. I wouldn't have known about Hattie's Work had they not said: "look what we found." So, I really feel like I wouldn't, we wouldn't be where we are at without them.

Collaboration

Collaboration was a common feature across several categories. Twelve principals noted the important role collaboration played in the turnaround process. Collaboration enabled teachers and principals to combat the isolation of a small rural school.

Principals

There were a variety of levels and opportunities for collaboration for the principals. Focus School principals were part of MoLEAD cadres, which provided leadership training through the Missouri Department of Education. The cadres became a group for support and contacts for the principals enabling them to collaborate with principals in similar situations. Along with MoLEAD, principals collaborated with in their districts or nearby towns. One principal collaborated with the principals of the three high schools her students fed into, making sure her students were successful when they moved to the next level. She was up-to-date on the curriculum the high school was using,

as well as aligning professional development days so that teachers could collaborate vertically. The RPDCs not only aided the principals in providing professional development for the teachers and an avenue for administrators to collaborate, but the RPDC consultants collaborated directly with the principals to determine instructional and professional development needs of their faculties.

A natural and daily type of collaboration for the principals was with their teachers. Principal-teacher collaboration was through Professional Learning Communities, committee work, and the overall day-to-day functions in a small school. One principal described the triad that he referred to as the Problem Solving Team or PST. This team was composed of himself, instructional coaches, and the counselor. They were his main leadership team that worked with the PLC's to keep them moving toward their goals. "These are the people in charge of these committees, let's get 'em going, and, and here's where we wanna be at."

When talking about improvements the school needed to make, a principal said, "Just helping the staff know, it was not a dig at them, let's work together and improve ourselves. And making sure they realized I was going to be in the midst of it helping them as much as I could."

Teachers

The change from teaching in isolation with your door closed, to one of collaboration, was a culture change for the schools. Through the implementation of Professional Learning Communities (PLC's), 13 of the schools increased their collaboration making it more productive. Yet, other smaller schools expressed the

sentiment that due to their small size, every meeting was a chance to collaborate, and there was no need for a formal process. The commonality between the schools whether through formal PLC's or informal, the teachers worked together to combat isolation by aligning curriculum and instructional practices horizontally and vertically. "My students" became "our students."

In the PLC process, teachers worked together to write common formative assessments, establish common learning targets and provide high quality instruction, no matter which classroom a student is in. One school became one of the 15 Exemplary PLC schools in the state of Missouri. The principal described the packet they put together for the state, "It was agendas and notes and things we did, you know, the PLC questions, what do we want students to know? How do we know that they learned it? What do we do with the ones who don't?"

Further explaining the importance of the PLC process to school improvement, a principal shared,

> Using data to drive instruction and the RTI model goes with the PLC process. But that was a huge thing that came out of that process where we really are providing enrichment for the kids who need enrichment and remediation for those who need remediation. But I also think relying on research, and that kind of goes along with the data driven instruction, but knowing what the research says.

Teachers also had the chance to see other schools and the practices they had put into place. A principal stated her philosophy of visiting other schools. "I will always let

people go visit a school. We just spent some time in San Sebastian because they've had great scores the past couple years, and looking at Eureka Math which is a Common Core Math."

In working to develop common assessments, a principal shared information about a collaboration grant,

> Being in a K-8, that is a hard thing. They don't have a lot of other English teachers that they can go talk to, or other 2nd grade teachers that they can go collaborate with. So, throughout this grant, and I'm really excited, next week our staff will be able to go to the RPDC and they will get to collaborate with other grade level or curriculum. However you want to look at that, teachers and they will have at least 3 of those set up throughout the school year so that we're not the only K-8 out here. You know what I'm saying?

As principals discussed collaboration, they used terms such as empowerment, teamwork, feedback, support and understanding. Collaboration, whether through a PLC or informal, successful collaboration was focused on meeting the needs of each student through assessment, instruction and intervention.

Data

Going hand-in-hand with the implementation of PLC's was the use of data. Data use was pervasive in all aspects of the principals' practices and improvement initiatives taking place at the schools. One principal credited the use of data teams as the number one practice to affect student learning,

> I would say data team is definitely our number one. Looking at where our students are as a whole, and what progress they are making individually even, and taking the time to talk about that, and common assessments would definitely be a big one. Having those assessments in place that we give to our students. So, we can see how they're going, so it's similar data, apples and apples that we can compare growth.

Twenty-one of the twenty-two principals provided information about the use of data in their schools. Data use permeated practices at all levels: students, teachers and administrators. Data from both formative and summative assessments were used in PLC's and interventions. Data was used in conjunction with Positive Behavior Supports programs. Student data use was a new practice at one school. "We're working right now on the assessment capable learner piece of Hattie's work, where students are setting personal goals and tracking their own data."

One principal spoke of the focus for the school year, "…diving into the data teams, building capacity with our teachers of understanding the power behind formative assessments and using the data we get back from those assessments to… impact our instruction."

When it comes to his use of data, a principal said, "I very seldom make decisions without collecting data first, and a lot of that data is going to come from my teachers because I look at this a little differently, and I always have." His description of data use summed up the theme of data use for all of the principals.

Assessment

The way in which schools assess and use assessment data was a shift for every school in the study. Principals talked about both formative and summative assessment. One principal attributed the use of assessment as one of the top three causes of her school's turnaround. "The third, I have to say was assessment and truly using the assessment and the data to drive instruction."

She spoke, not only of formative assessment, but benchmark assessments as well. Another principal expressed the same sentiment toward the importance of formative assessment to drive instruction. Along with the state assessment, the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) schools used a variety of assessment programs including: AIMSweb, iReady, STAR Reading, STAR Math, the DRA and Aquity. As part of PLCs, schools also used common assessments aligned to the Missouri Learning Standards. Common assessments helped with horizontal alignment of curriculum and assessment; ensuring students in multi-section schools had a similar educational experience. A principal explained this, "Having those assessments in place that we give to our students so we can see how they're going, so it's similar data, apples and apples that we can compare."

Summary of Curriculum and Instruction

The theme of curriculum and instruction included components of the curriculum, instructional practices, professional development, collaboration, data and assessment. Changes in the areas of curriculum and instruction, according to the principals, facilitated

the increase in achievement in the schools. Table 8 provides a summary of the elements of the third theme, curriculum and instruction.

Table 8.

Elements of Curriculum and Instruction

Curriculum	Curriculum changes included textbook adoptions, standards alignment, vertical and horizontal curriculum alignment, and curriculum adoptions or revisions.
Instructional Practices	RTI programs, differentiated instruction, John Hattie's work, data use, and increased instructional minutes comprised the instructional practices changed in reading, math and technology attributed to improved student achievement.
Professional Development	Professional development was required in order to facilitate the changes to instructional practices. The Regional Professional Development Center consultants, outside consultants, as well as through Professional Learning Communities, provided professional development.
Collaboration	Collaboration occurred within two groups. Principals collaborated with other principals through MoLEAD or on their own. Teachers collaborated through Professional Learning Communities in their schools or with teachers in other schools and districts. Collaboration was both formal and informal.
Data	The use of data, an integral part of Professional Learning Communities, became pervasive in all aspects of school improvement. Schools not utilizing formal Professional Learning Communities also used data. Students also were taught to use data to assess their own learning goals.
Assessment	The use of assessments and assessment data underwent a shift in the schools. Assessment became a tool to drive instruction. Common assessments aligned to the curriculum wee developed ensuring students in multi-section schools received a similar educational experience.

CHAPTER 7

SYSTEMS

Introduction

For the study, systems referred to the practices and changes that effected the school as a whole, leading to sustainable change including programs, allocation of resources, and culture. System changes and restructuring are reported in this section.

System Changes

In order for turnaround improvements to become sustainable, system changes need to take place. During the interviews, system changes or qualities of the process of systems change were part of the conversations. The premise behind the Missouri School Improvement Plan (MSIP) was to institute system change in the state's failing schools. Because MSIP was DESE driven, DESE area supervisors and RPDC consultants had a hand in both initiating system changes and full implementation. For one school, system changes began with the principal in 2007 when the school was being classified as a school "in distress." He provided this comment,

> We redid our Mission and Vision and we got in these little touchy/feely groups. We did the Compass where you're a North or a South, an East or a West. Even though they thought it was unproductive it was more productive, than they thought because it opened their eyes to camaraderie.

Continuing with their successes, he talked about the implementation of the PLC process and how it has become part of their culture. The PLC process was just a part of the system change at the school and he credits the RPDC with the change.

> I feel that five years ago, them forcing us to go, basically they took over our PD. The area leader did and the superintendent had to meet with him and okay all the PD, which basically centered on PLCs. And looking back now, I would say that's probably the biggest thing that happened. Was it easy? No it wasn't. I mean there was a lot of gnashing of teeth and there was a lot of "why are we doing this? This is stupid." But looking back now, I can see why it was done the way it was done. Because they basically broke us out of our old ways and molded us back into the staff, the school district we are now.

Each school I visited, had a similar story. System change was essential to the turnaround process. In some schools, the change was initiated by the state, and in others, it was initiated by new leadership in the building.

Restructuring

Two main areas for restructuring within the schools were schedules and personnel use. The purpose for structuring schedules was to create time for teacher collaboration, PLCs, uninterrupted blocks of reading instruction, and set times for RTI. 14 of the 23 principals noted the importance of schedule changes in order to improve student learning and collaboration. Personnel use was another area that was restructured. The main purpose was to provide across the board RTI time for students and add small group

reading and math instruction. In the restructuring, Title I teachers and aides were used more to reach a larger number of students. Some schools used every staff member to help with RTI including guidance counselors, PE teachers and the principal. One principal reported their success,

> At same time… what we've done since then, we've added to, is more of the true invention system, or RTI that's also K-8, versus a K… 3, and 4's, and 5's, and 6-8 didn't have anything. And so we have what we call T Bird time every day. It's 30 minutes in the morning for 6th grade by themselves, and its 30 minutes in the afternoon for 7 and 8th grade, and we have a 3-tier system. Basically anybody missing 3 or more homework assignments, anybody with 3 or more ODR's, … they go to the black level, per say, which is in with our counselor, and one of our instructional coaches.

Summary of Systems

In order to create sustainable change in the schools, it was necessary to change or adopt new systems within the schools. The theme of systems reported system changes and restructuring. System change included having clear vision, mission and goals, which facilitated change within the schools. Restructuring included changes to the school day and personnel use. Table 9 summarizes the elements of the fourth theme, systems.

Table 9.

Elements of Systems

System Change	Sustainable turnaround improvements required system changes. System changes included creating a clear vision, mission and goals, Programs, resource allocations, and culture also reinforced system changes. New leadership, change in the current leadership's knowledge or philosophy, or the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education initiated changes.
Restructuring	Two areas of restructuring were dominant, schedules and personnel. Time was created in schedules for collaboration, uninterrupted reading instruction, or RTI. Personnel were used in new ways to increase the use of small group instruction and maximize the use of specialized teachers, such as a Title I reading teacher.

CHAPTER 8

CHALLENGES

Introduction

The theme included the variety of challenges principals face in small rural high poverty schools and the measures taken to overcome the challenges. There were three categories in the theme: Poverty, Rural and General Challenges, Overcoming Poverty and Finance and Resources.

Poverty, Rural and General Challenges

Principals recognized their challenges, and rather than be overwhelmed or discouraged by them, chose to find solutions. Only the challenges, not the solutions, are provided here. Challenges were categorized as poverty when whether in an urban or rural setting, the challenge would exist. Rural challenges were those that were present due to the location and but not income level. Some challenges were broader and were not based on poverty or location. These were coded as general challenges.

Poverty Challenges

High poverty presented challenges to student achievement. The poverty challenges were due to lack of background knowledge, poor nutrition, attendance issues and the perceived importance of education. A principal expressed the concerns of principals through the following comment, "…all of the educational correlations that come with poverty, like lower performance, less support from family members, we deal with those issues, but the actual physical need part we've kind of got a handle on."

Efforts to meet the basic needs of students were common practices in the schools. Although this was a challenge, the principals noted the programs in place to address the student needs At times, the issue was just getting the student to school. A principal said that when a child missed the bus, often parents did not have a way to get the child to school. She would hop in the car and go get the child so the child would not miss a day of school.

Lack of parental was described by one principal, "…one or two families that read to their kids and they can count, those families you spot out really quick."

Another principal noted his concerns: a school with 68% FRL, including family structure, lack of parent education, meth addiction, and the loss of jobs in the area. A unique challenge to one school was the high poverty and strong community pride.

> We have, you need to know this, we have a 60% free and reduced lunch rate, approximately between 55 and 65. So it's not economically thrivin', no. But, it has a strong German heritage, and German culture. It has a strong pride factor in the community, sometimes detrimental. It's considered a premier community to raise your kids and live in, even though it's not economically thrivin'.

The principal spoke extensively about the school's successful athletics and fine arts programs. He took me to the cafeteria, which housed a display of the various awards. As he showed me the evidence of the athletic successes of the school, he spoke of how the community equated the extracurricular successes with academic success. He reported

the challenges of having to meet the basic needs of the students, including difficult home environments.

Rural Challenges

Rural challenges impacted the schools in the areas of resources, personnel, importance of education, weather and mobility. Lack of financial resources and community resources were common. In one principal's area, the closest doctors were an hour to an hour and a half away, making medical care a concern for many children. Technology was a difficult resource to procure. One principal told of her students' limited internet access in their homes. There was a need for a 1:1 initiative, enabling students to take a device home. A most important resource was money. Finances were a challenge in the rural areas due to declining economies. As school populations shrink, so do the budgets. Principals stated the need to look closely and budget and to be creative with resources. A principal wrote a STEM grant for Lego STEM sets and hopes for success in being awarded a grant.

Teachers were an important factor in student achievement. Hiring and retention of teachers in a rural area was a challenge for the principals. Low pay, lack of resources and opportunities, lured young teachers away from the rural schools. One principal mentioned her concern. "We have a low base salary, $30,000. We lose people every year for $5000 to $10,000 raises fifteen minutes from here. So with that turnover comes the challenge of keeping people trained and up to speed."

The principals wore many hats due to lack of personnel.

The importance of education due to the rural aspect of the community was affected as well by poverty. One principal reported a conversation with one student.

> When I ask a 2nd grader what his favorite color is and he tells me camouflage, you know you're in rural America. Dead, serious question. Then he started telling me about he's scoping in his 357 magnum to get his deer for the youth hunt that's coming up. This is all about hunting and gathering here. If it is brown, it is down and it's going to get eaten.

His remarks illustrated the importance of obtaining food for a student in his school. Another principal said her students often set their traps before coming to school; and, the opening day of hunting season affects attendance. A principal reported a common situation at his school, "…education is not top priority. I mean a lot of the kids in our district, if dad says, 'Hey I think we need to go fishing today.' I mean they go fishing."

Inclement weather affects school in most Midwestern states. In the Ozark area of Missouri, ice can result in the decision to call off. Students at one school missed 24 days of school due to ice and snow. This common occurrence was another obstacle to keeping students in school.

The final challenge was mobility. One principal used the analogy of a swinging door to describe her transient families. Another principal shared that his transient population was made up of students with low socio economic status and those who had attendance problems while enrolled in the district. One principal described an increase in mobility during the past ten years. Another school is in a summer resort area. It was

normal for some students to be in and out of the district three or four times due to seasonal work tied to area tourism. A principal talked about how mobility affected the students. " We've had kids come in here be in different school districts three times in a year for example, and every time they change a course they lose some kind of… education, I mean they start regressing a little bit."

General challenges

There are challenges in all educational institutions, which are not dependent on poverty or the rural nature of the school. One challenge expressed by principals was time. A principal said, "We're looking for ways to squeeze more time out of every single day. And, you know, when you ask teachers what's your biggest impediment, they always say time." Restructuring the day and looking for minutes wasted on bus arrival and departures were two ways principals dealt with squeezing more instructional time into the day.

Class size was addressed on both sides of the spectrum. In one school, class size was viewed as too large with 25 students in a class, while another principal shared the concern that in small classes, one student can represent 20% of the proficiency rate for the class. Small size was not only a challenge for proficiency percentages, but it presented a challenge for collaboration for teachers. Being the only 3rd grade teacher in a building can be difficult. At one school, teachers taught multiple grade levels in the same classroom.

Other challenges principals talked about were adapting over to computerized testing, keeping up with technology, and encouraging seasoned teachers to implement new

best practices. As with other challenges, the principals initially described the challenge, but then, would describe the steps they were taking to overcome the challenges.

Overcoming Poverty

The central cause of low student achievement in the rural turnaround schools was the prevalence of poverty. In order to turn the schools around, principals had to find ways to overcome the effects of poverty. Changing the culture or the heartbeat of the school must be accomplished first, but even with a great culture, students' basic needs must be met. Overcoming poverty was defined through statements made regarding the programs, personnel, practices and professional development designed to help students who have needs associated with poverty.

Backpack Buddie programs provided backpacks filled with food for students to take home, to help them get through the weekend or school breaks. Five schools referred to the program. During the school week children were provided with breakfast and lunch. They were assured of at least two meals per day. During the weekend, students did not always know the when or where of their next. In some schools, local churches or businesses sponsored backpack programs. One school was 75% FRL. With the help of the local community, they have a food bank under their gym. "Once a month we do a food drive and then provide food to the families that have kids here in school you know that are disadvantaged."

Eight schools have implemented preschool programs to combat a lack of background knowledge and provide young children with a jumpstart to their education. One school had three and four-year-old preschool classes, which met for a full day, five

days a week. When funding from the state was reduced, the principal went to the school board for support. They have been paying the preschool bill for the past three years.

One principal mentioned doing work with Ruby Payne. “We sent several [of the faculty] to her trainings. We use her books to get people familiar with how the poverty challenge, how you have to understand it. How you can’t judge, you have to understand.”

A principal and the faculty had to change their mindset about working with children who come from poverty, “That was a big realization for us as a staff. You can use it the environment as a excuse; but, we have to do the best we can with what we have here at school, that is a hard one.”

In stating his philosophy of working with children in poverty one principal noted the core of what it takes.

> But I think the culture that these kids come to school in, has to fit them. Because our kids need their, they’re very needy here. You know I’ve given away shoes, pants; I don’t have to worry about a dress code here. Half the time my kids don’t have clothes. They have to come to you and ask for clothes. We have a clothes closet here. It’s like ‘Lets just go shopping and get what you want.’ We have to give students a chance to succeed within their culture; and, they really want to do well for you. They want to do well. Like I tell them, winning and losing with dignity. How do you do that? And you have to teach them that. So I think the culture probably is the biggest thing here. I can implement any curriculum here. Anybody can implement a curriculum, but not unless you got the teachers

> that care to do it. On the kid's side, you better have the type of culture that's going to foster that.

Finance and Resources

Creativity in finding finances to provide resources was a common conversation topic. One principal was an avid grant writer. She not only wrote a grant to get a bus; she involved her school in studies and initiatives that would provide funding. A recent accomplishment was a Science and Math professional development opportunity for a team of four teachers. Two principals were able to get tax levies passed in their communities to keep their schools going. One principal provided the story of their fight to keep the school open.

> …twelve years ago this school was bankrupt. It was down to like $3000 in reserves. The community went together and had Barbecues, sales. Our tax levy is almost $6. They voted that in to pay to keep the school open. … But the community pride, this is all they got. They don't have anything else. It's the only show in town. There's only one church. I mean there's 10 houses, this is it.

Each principal provided an example of the necessity to find funding and their dedication to getting materials teachers needed to help students be successful.

Summary of Challenges

Challenges faced by the principals were placed into three categories: Poverty, Rural and General Challenges, Overcoming Poverty and Finance and Resources. In the interviews, principals shared not only the challenges faced in small rural high poverty

schools, but also the steps taken to overcome the challenges. Overcoming challenges involved the principal, faculty and staff, along with the local community. Table 10 summarized the elements in the fifth theme, challenges.

Table 10.

Elements of Challenges

Poverty, rural, and general challenges	Challenges due to poverty included lack of student background knowledge, poor nutrition, attendance issues, and the perceived importance of education. Rural challenges impacted the schools' availability of resources, perceived importance of education, student mobility and the impact of weather accessibility to school. General challenges included instructional minutes, collaboration time and class size. Small class sizes distort proficiency data.
Overcoming poverty	To turn the school around, the challenges of poverty were overcome through programs, personnel, practices and professional development. Programs included Backpack Buddies, free breakfast and lunch, preschool, and Ruby Payne training.
Finance and resources	Principals provided resources through grant writing, tax levies and maximizing the allocation of resources.

CHAPTER 9

STAKEHOLDERS

Introduction

Students are the beneficiaries of the turnaround schools. Along with the students and principals, there are other constituencies that have a stake in the principal's ability to get the failing school turned around. Those constituents who have a vested interest in the school are referred to as stakeholders. Faculty and staff, local community and parents are stakeholders.

Faculty and Staff

Faculty and staff are integral to the culture of the school. Hiring was one of the important tasks of a principal. Faculty and staff included teachers and classroom aides, as well as their duties, interactions, and characteristics. The importance of faculty and staff was suggested by one principal who said, "I've always said this no matter what school I've been, the bottom line is the teacher."

Another principal said, "I'm going to go back to the things I've been saying, we put good people in good places and get out of their way."

Teacher impact was noted by another principal,

> …in this community, we have teachers that have been here for quite a long time. You know, a lot of them are home grown and have lived here and they really invest in the community. I think that they also invest in their kids and take it very personally and want them all to succeed.

Although there was extensive discussion about teachers, the essence of the discussion was: hire the best, give them the tools they need, give them support and invest in teachers who are invested in the community.

Local Community

The principal's story about the successful tax levy showed the community support for the school. Another principal provided a similar story. The day I was at the school, the school had invited the community to a Thanksgiving Dinner prepared and served in the cafeteria. At each school, the Local community was viewed as a support to the school. The schools are the hope and the hub of the rural communities. Not only do the communities have pride in the schools, as stakeholders, they want to feel they are a valued part of the school. A principal talked about how she learned the importance of positive communication and building relationships with all stakeholders.

> When I got the job, my very first visit down here, I went to Dollar General, which is the only store in town. Somehow, I don't even know how, but they figured out that that's who I was. And some lady in the parking lot said, "Are you the new principal?" And I said, "Yes." And she said, "I hated that guy." And I said, "What guy?" And she said, "The other Principal." And I said, "I'm Sorry." And she said, "He thought he was better than us and he wasn't better than us." I could tell right then that that was what I was dealing with.

Parents

A principal noted the importance of working with the parents to improve student learning. For many students, they do not get much positive reinforcement for education at home. “I don’t mean they are abusing any kids; but, education is not top priority. I mean a lot of the kids in our district, if dad says, ‘Hey I think we need to go fishing today.’ They go fishing.” Not only are fishing and hunting an obstacle to keeping students at school, but the lack of parent education and parents who are on government subsidies may be obstacles as well. One principal reported a conversation he had with one of the students as he talked about the importance of the parents in student achievement.

> To get these kids to believe “I can.” You know mom and dad. Well yeah, mom and dad’s doing all right and they’re living on what do they call that entitlement? Yeah, that’s what they call it “entitlement” and your parents are great people but don’t you want more?

One principal was concerned about the home environments of the students. His school was 60% FRL. Many of their basic needs were not being met. He also noted concerns for his students in relation to their safety at home. He referred to the county as the “meth capital of the world.” He said the upside to the meth problem was that students whose parents were involved in meth were always at school because the parents do not want the sheriff knocking at their doors. They try to lay low and not draw attention to themselves.

Principals described the variety of ways they tried to involve the parents in the school. Communication was very important and included email, phone conversations or

conferences. One principal brought parents to the school for their celebrations. The school used perfect attendance award ceremonies as a way to increase positive parent involvement. “We throw out a little red paper, like it’s red carpet, and they all clap and cheer and parents come and take pictures.” Overall, supporting parents and students through communication was essential to changing the culture of the schools and increasing student achievement.

Summary of Stakeholders

The stakeholders of the schools involved in the study included faculty and staff, local community and parents. The stakeholders of the school have a vested interest in the school becoming successful in increasing student academic achievement and keeping the school open. Table 11 summarizes the elements of the sixth theme, stakeholders.

Table 11.

Elements of Stakeholders

Faculty and staff	Integral to the school culture, hiring teachers and classroom aides was reported to be an important task for the principals. The importance of providing support and necessary tools to do their jobs was also reported.
Local community	The schools and local communities had a symbiotic relationship, with the school frequently being the hub of the community. Building positive relationships through communication facilitated community support. A strong school strengthened the community.
Parents	Parent involvement in the school was increased through communication, and celebrations. Increasing parental support of their child’s education resulted in the improved school culture and increase in student achievement.

CHAPTER 10

THE MISSOURI DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

Introduction

In this section, the, actions the state of Missouri had taken to increase student achievement are presented. Although part of all the interviews, DESE received positive and negative comments from the principals. Yet, there were similarities described in how the department helped the schools to improve student achievement. The statements made by the interviewees regarding the Missouri Department of Education programs, positions, initiatives, and policies are presented, Also included are the department descriptors used to communicate the impact of those programs, positions, initiatives and policies on student achievement.

Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

As part of the NCLB waiver granted to Missouri, are new requirements and designations were put into place. The schools that were designated focus schools had the most interaction with DESE. Each school was assigned an Area Supervisor to work with them. They met on a monthly basis. The schools working directly with DESE had positive responses to the question regarding DESE's role in their school's improvement. One principal of a focus school comments mirrored the sentiments of the principals interviewed.

> Well, this is a dirty word in Missouri, but it's called the Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP). And at that time, districts became

> accredited, or provisionally accredited, or unaccredited, or accredited with distinction. Honestly, as big of a pain as it was, it was good for kids in Missouri…
>
> It does create that sense of urgency. And honestly, being provisionally accredited at the time, I thought it was the worst thing that happened to us. But honestly it was probably one of the best things that happened to us.

Principals of focus schools discussed MoLEAD, a mandatory leadership workshop they attended due to their school's status. A principal described his MoLEAD experience two years ago as an experience that got him out of his comfort zone. It woke up the leadership side of him. Another principal credited her MoLEAD experience with a big part of the initial turnaround for the school. It allowed her to develop her leadership skills and network with people across the state. A principal's statement "What gets monitored, gets done," not only fits with DESE, but with other areas in school turnaround.

Summary of the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Both directly and indirectly, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education played a role in the increased student achievement of the schools in the study. Through the urgency created by the state accountability system, principals were compelled to make the necessary changes needed to become a turnaround school. Table 12 summarizes the final theme, the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

Table 12.

Elements of the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE)	Principals reported DESE directly or indirectly played a role in the turnaround process. MSIP, the accountability system, created a sense of urgency for the schools. DESE also provided supports through MoLEAD and the area supervisors.

Summary

Chapter Four provided the analysis of the collective case study on principal practices in rural high poverty Missouri turnaround elementary schools. Interview and observation data consisted of a total of 27 interviews with 22 principals, five of whom served as superintendent as well, one superintendent, two DESE area supervisors and two RPDC consultants. Of the 27 interviews, the information provided by the 22 principals was the more pertinent to the study. Therefore, the information from the superintendents, DESE area supervisors and RPDC consultants was not essential to the analysis. Themes were identified through the analysis of the interview transcripts. The themes included the information about the interviewees, and the turnaround process. One principal summed up the factors common to the turnaround schools in the study.

> Well, I'll probably give you an umbrella answer, and underneath that umbrella answer, there is about 4 things. The umbrella answer is the environment. Underneath that, I think it is raising expectations. Assisting teachers in gathering the data necessary. Focusing on the most important things to get the best bang for our buck.

Chapter Five provides discussion, conclusions and implications based on the findings, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 11

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of the collective case study was to examine the practices of principals in Missouri rural, high poverty, turnaround elementary schools. In answering the central question, "What are the practices of turnaround principals in the rural elementary setting?" interviews, observations and demographic data were used. Interview data supported the research questions,

- What contributed to the success of the schools that have increased student achievement?
- What actions did the state of Missouri take to increase student achievement?

The data analysis described the principals' practices and their impact on the turnaround process.

Themes

The theoretical framework of the study was transformational leadership, which in the context of the study was referred to as turnaround school leadership. Under the framework of turnaround leadership, seven themes emerged and are listed below in order of importance as indicated by number of times they arose in the interviews,

1. Culture
2. Leadership
3. Curriculum and Instruction
4. Systems

5. Challenges
6. Stakeholders
7. Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Figure 5 Model of Turnaround Leadership, shows the relationship of the themes to turnaround leadership. Turnaround leadership was the overarching theme of the study. There was a hierarchy of the themes in their effect on turnaround schools. DESE was the outside force, the impetus for change. In order for the turnaround process to take place, culture was changed. The five remaining themes all contributed to the culture change or are themselves affected by the culture change. Without a change in the culture of a school, the turnaround process was doomed. According to Reeves (2009), when writing about key learning from the educational standard movement, "…policy change without cultural change is an exercise in futility and frustration" (p.37).

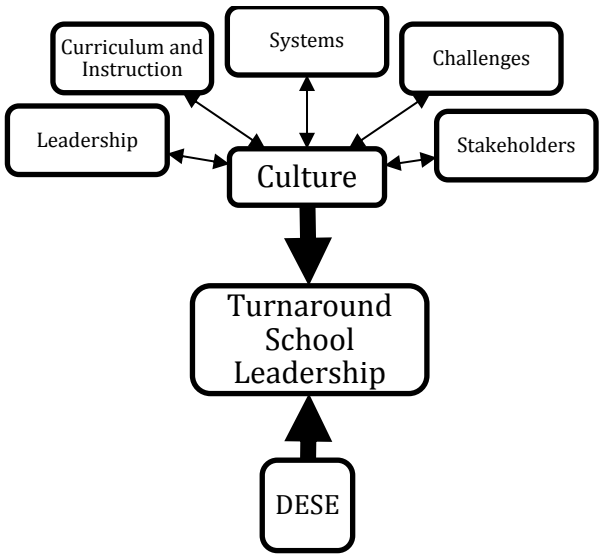

Figure 5 Model of Turnaround Leadership. This figure illustrates the relationship between turnaround leadership and the themes that emerged in the study.

Culture

First and foremost, in order to turn a school around, principals changed the school culture to one that valued education, collaboration, and high expectations. Duke, Carr & Sterrett (2013) stated culture change was deep change that must occur from within, and principals "must focus on recognizing and reinforcing the desired norms, values, and expectations" (p.151). Duke, et al. (2013) also addressed the multiple lenses through which culture was seen by teachers, students, custodians, and parents.

Changing the culture of a school required a direct conscientious effort. Communication of expectations for students, teachers and parents was key for the principals in developing the new culture norms in the schools. As well as changing the social-emotional environment of the building, improved aesthetics provided a quick easy win for improvement. Programs such as PBS and those to help overcome poverty, for example the backpack buddy program, were important to improving the culture of the building. Fullan (2006) speaks to the need for internal pressure to facilitate change, which he referred to as an internal accountability system. Learning new behaviors and values developed the internal accountability system. Changing beliefs; increased, focused communication geared toward specific groups of people; increased safety; improved facilities; and new or improved programs all led to an improved internal accountability system within the turnaround schools in the study. Figure 6 illustrates the components principals in the study used in order to change the culture of the school. As the components overcame the inertia of the low performing culture, positive changes to the culture began the process of shifting to a positive culture. The components involved then

began to take on more positive characteristics and further fed the positive movement of the culture to that of a high performing school.

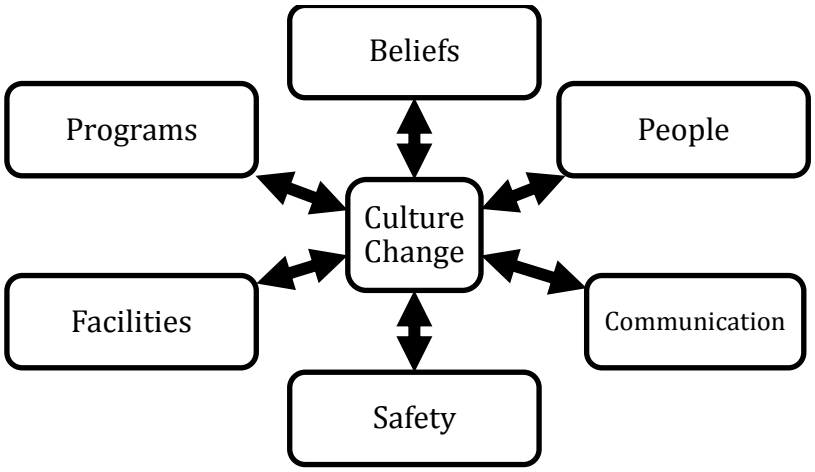

Figure 6. Components of Culture Change. This figure illustrates the components a turnaround principal needs to take into consideration when changing the culture of a rural school and the continual back and forth affect they have on each which can cause a positive change.

Leadership

The internal accountability system addressed under culture was best quickly brought about by leadership, and often, new leadership (Fullan, 2006). Principals in the study were frequently new to the school. Those who had been in the school, changed their practices, which caused new leadership. Figure 7 illustrates the categories in the theme of Leadership. For the turnaround principals in the study, four categories came together to form their leadership identity.

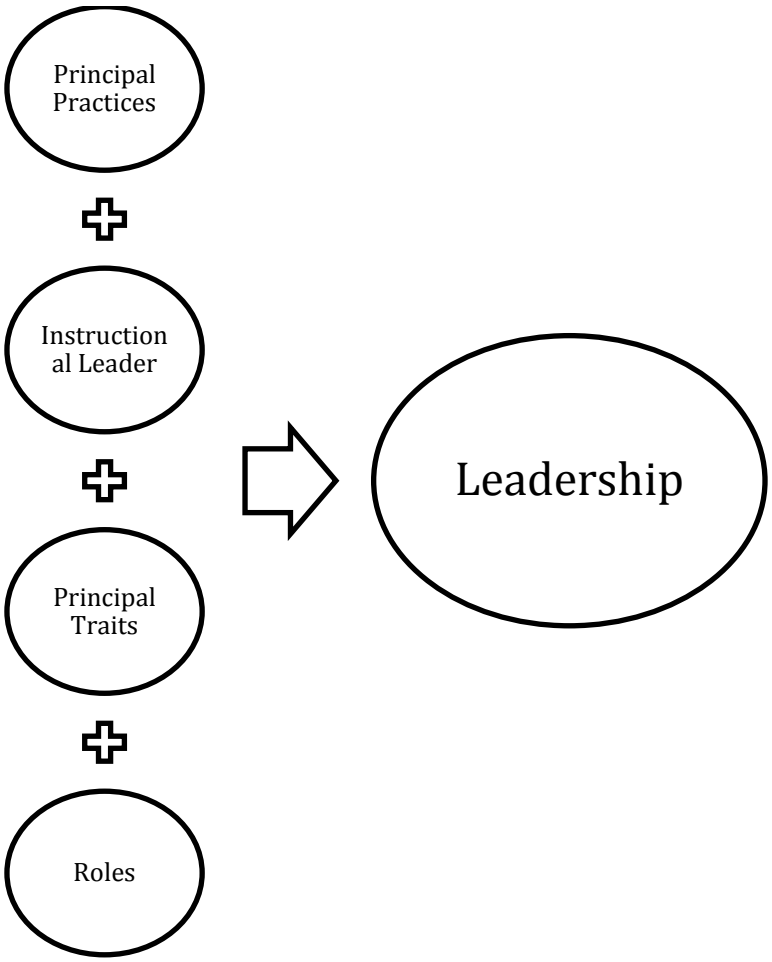

Figure 7. Categories contributing to turnaround leadership. Figure 7 illustrates the how the categories included in the theme contribute to turnaround leadership.

Specific principal practices shared in the interviews involved action. Providing support for teachers, students and parents was essential. A key component of providing support was communication through visibility, an open door policy, and providing needed materials. Supporting students and staff went hand in hand with culture; letting students and staff know they were important. Figure 8 illustrates the relationship among the principal practices. One group of practices emerged that fit under the subcategories of support, build and find. These action verbs were used by principals when talking about

their practices and made for a natural grouping set aside from the other practices, under the subcategory of Additional Practices. This organization does not indicate importance rather instead commonalities. Principals who had the ability to turn a school around were doers, people of action. Fullan (2006) states "Change by doing rather than change by elaborate planning" (p.44).

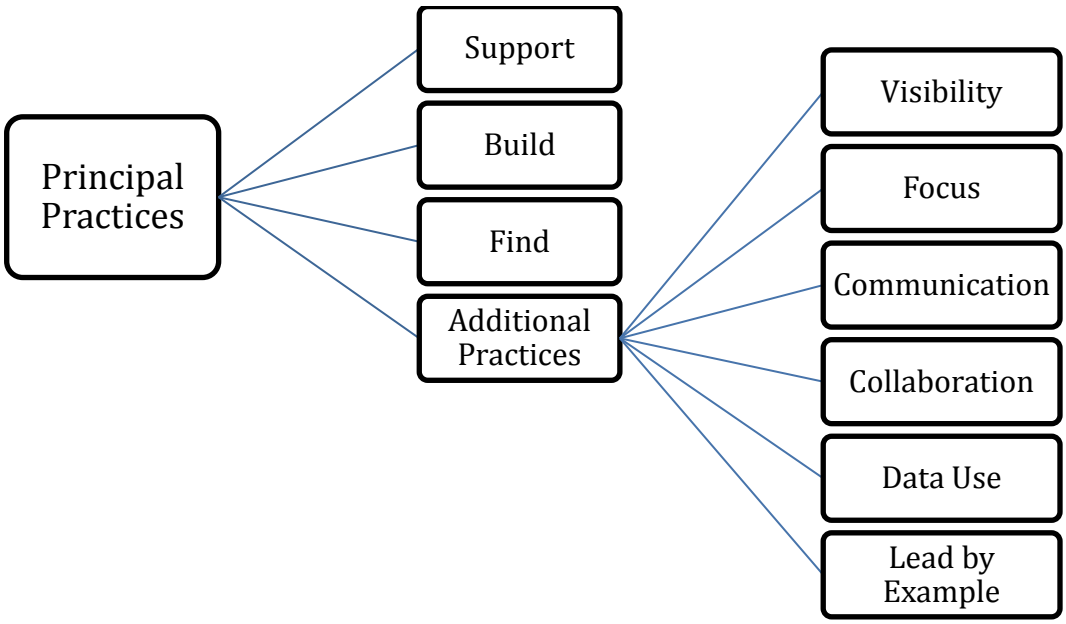

Figure 8. Principal Practices. Figure 8 illustrates the relationship of the various principal practices. They are not in order of importance rather by natural grouping.

Principals spoke to the importance of being the instructional leader of the school. In small rural schools there were many managerial tasks that got in the way of instructional leadership, but the principals in the study were cognizant its importance and made it a priority.

Principal Traits made for an interesting study both demographically and in their self described traits. A common trait for all of the principals was their commitment to

small rural education and in most cases, the particular the school where they were currently serving as principal. Reasons for the commitment included alumni status; children attendance the school; and being from the community, one nearby or one very similar when growing up. Commitment was essential to the turnaround process. The traits of resourcefulness, flexibility, and students first were the other outstanding traits exhibited by the principals.

Reeves (2009) addressed the importance of doing the "scut work", taking a turn as a substitute teacher and spending time with the bus drivers because it demonstrated "relentless personal attention" required for change. The principals in the study engaged in the scut work through the variety of roles they fulfilled, demonstrating commitment, leadership by doing, and relentless personal attention to the success of the schools as another core component of their leadership philosophy.

Curriculum and Instruction

Principals talked at length about the changes that needed to be made to curriculum, instruction and assessment. The ability to make the needed changes came through professional development, collaboration and data use. These six categories worked together to create the improved student achievement. Though the categories in the theme of curriculum and instruction were not principal practices, the principals facilitated the changes in these categories through their leadership, contributing to improved student achievement. Figure 9 illustrates the cycle of improved student achievement as an open cycle. The cycle, while appearing sequential, need not be. To some degree, the categories must all be present in the cycle for the turnaround process to be successful.

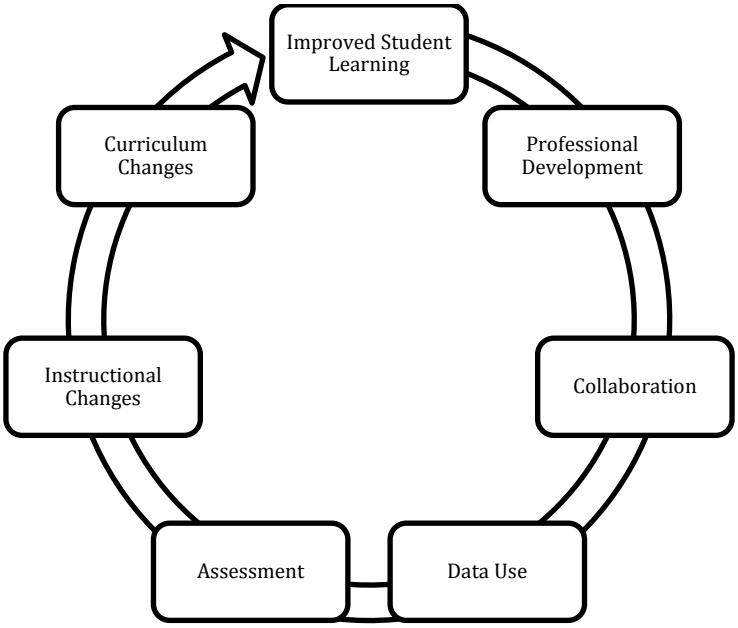

Figure 9. Curriculum and Instruction Cycle for Improved Student Learning. Figure 9 illustrates the cycle of improved student achievement as an open cycle. The categories in the theme need not happen in the particular order they appear, especially curriculum and instructional changes. Professional development, collaboration and data use are essential in enacting the needed changes to assessment, instruction and curriculum.

Systems

The theme of systems was essential for sustained school improvement. Being the fourth theme does not indicate its level of importance. In order for change to be lasting and transformational, the system must be changed. In his book, *Transforming Leadership*, Burns (2003), wrote about the power of vision and the role of the leader. "The word for this process is empowerment. Instead of exercising power over people, transforming leaders champion and inspire followers"(p. 26). When writing further about what is necessary, "Transforming values lie at the heart of transforming leadership, determining whether leadership indeed can be transforming" (p.29). In the Systems theme, principals shared their visions, mission, values and goals that led to transformation of the schools,

which was more than ordinary change. In the Systems theme, restructuring addressed schedules and personnel, and transactional changes that took place to accomplish the vision, mission, values and goals of the school.

Challenges

The theme of challenges addressed not only the challenges principals and schools overcame, but also the steps taken to overcome them. Poverty and rural culture brought with them unique challenges for the schools to overcome. These coupled with the challenges common to all schools, made rural, high poverty school turnaround a difficult situation. Principals in the study tackled the challenges head on through their leadership, programs and services. Principals ensured students' basic needs were met so they could focus on learning to overcome some of the challenges of poverty. Many principals did this by employing the help of the local communities.

A lack of belief in the importance of education fell under both poverty and rural culture. Principals used parent communication and programs to help instill the perception of importance of education in the school families. In general, principals had to be creative and resourceful when working in a rural high poverty school. Again, the theme of challenges had a direct effect on the culture of the school, and as the culture improved, it lessened the challenges presented. Culture and challenges were mutually beneficial. In statistical terms, they have a negative relationship. As the culture improved, the challenges decreased.

From the interviews, it was concluded that a principal could affect change in a turnaround school through new or improved programs and services. Funding was out of

their control in the areas of state and federal funding. In some cases, principals were able to increase local tax levies, which resulted in increased funding, or attained outside resources through grants and partnerships.

Stakeholders

Stakeholders in the theme consisted of faculty and staff, parents, and the local community. The interview and survey data both led to the conclusion of the importance of communication. It was through communication with the three groups that principals shared their vision for the school, listened to concerns and developed solutions. With each group of stakeholders a variety of communication strategies needed to be employed. Especially among the faculty and staff and the local community, identifying key players helped turn the entire group positively impacting culture. The essential buy-in needed for the changes was created.

Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

The question still remained, what was unique to Missouri to affect such widespread turnaround in its schools? Two strands emerged to offer explanation. The data pointed to pressure from the state, and in addition, financial support and support from the RPDC consultants. The RPDC consultants were in the schools working side by side with the principal and teachers. Missouri's schools are not consolidated districts and the school's in the study all had a student population of less than 400. The first can be illustrated with an analogy of a large ship versus a small boat. A large ship is slower to turn requiring a larger path, while the small boat turns quickly requiring a smaller path. This suggests a benefit to keeping schools small and avoiding consolidation. In a small

school, each child represents a larger percent of the population; therefore a greater gain when they improve. The converse is also true in causing a greater loss when a student fails. In small schools, it is easier to identify students who need remediation and to provide individualized, specific interventions. A small the boat moves quicker than a ship. In Missouri, a state plan, including pressure and support, coupled with smaller schools, was the "added extra," making the turnaround principals' efforts successful.

CHAPTER 12

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

The elementary schools and principals were all unique. However, there are conclusions that can be drawn from examining the cases collectively relating to the research question:

- What contributed to the success of the schools that have increased student achievement?

The conclusions are not generalizable to all elementary principals and schools due to differences in state student achievement measures, state curriculum standards, and state indicators of school success. Figure 10 illustrates how the themes related to the Missouri turnaround school process.

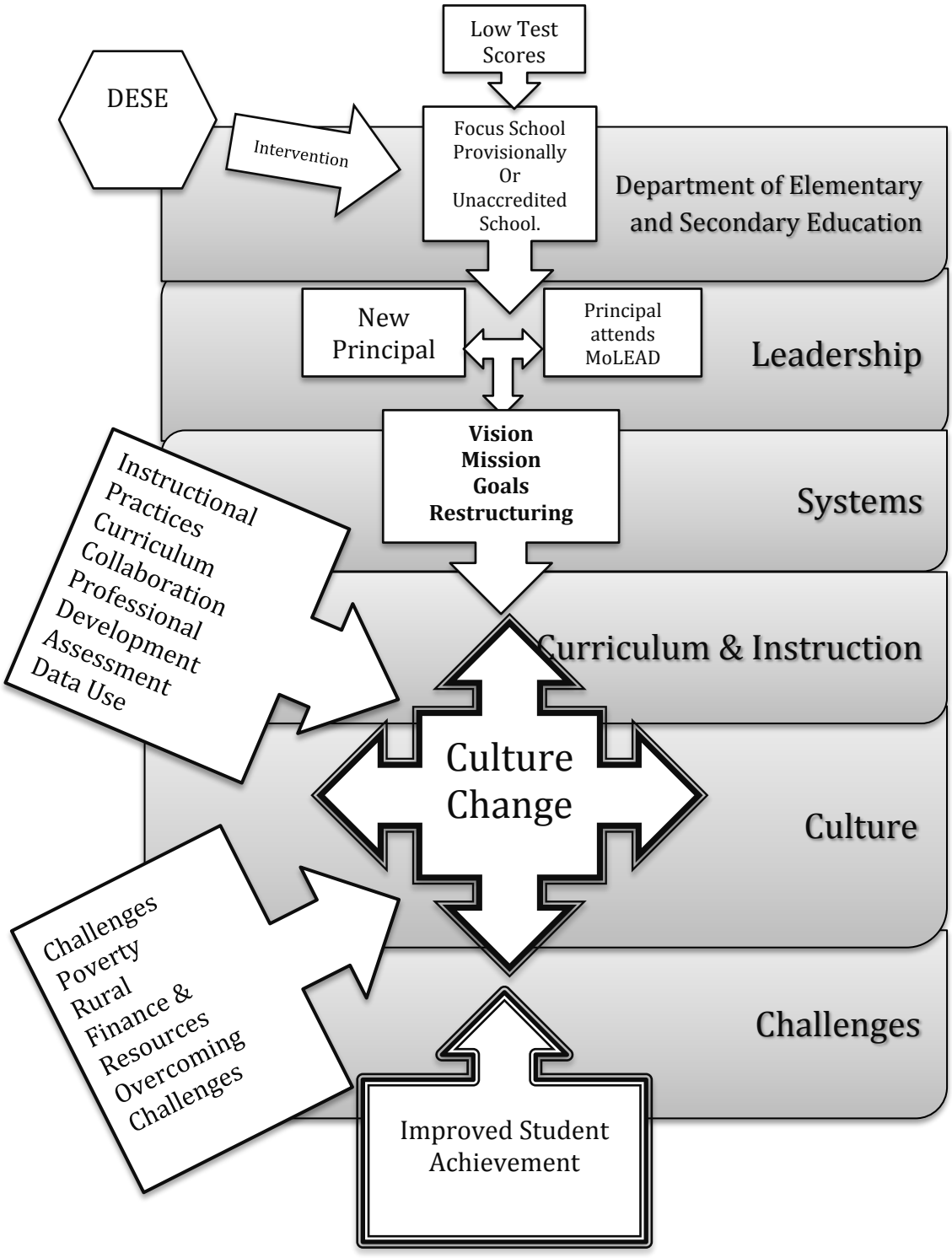

Figure 10. Seven Themes and the Missouri School Turnaround Process**.** Figure 10 illustrates how the seven themes of the study relate to the school turnaround process in the schools reported in this collective case study.

Conclusions

The cases reported in the study indicated that turnaround principals must facilitate change in the culture of the school first and foremost. Culture change occurs through improved communication across all stakeholders, including students. Improved communication occurs through increased teacher collaboration, visibility in the classrooms, an open door policy, increased parental involvement, and visibility in the community.

Being the instructional leader of the building was the second contributing factor to the success in the school turnaround process. As instructional leaders, principals used data in making decisions, and provided professional development on research-based best practices. Structures provided within the schools to promoted teacher collaboration, which ensured vertical and horizontal alignment of the curriculum. As instructional leaders, principals used wise allocation of resources or found the necessary resources to provide the needed materials and personnel to support student and teacher success. Finally, as the instructional leader of the building, principals held all members, teachers and staff, accountable for student success. As one of the principals reported in the interview, "What gets monitored gets done." Students were accountable for their own learning. Teachers were accountable for providing the appropriate curriculum and instruction to meet each child's needs. Parents were accountable for supporting the education of their children. The principal was accountable to the superintendent, the Board of Education and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to provide a culture of high expectations for student learning. Principals saw themselves as

accountable to the students, faculty and staff, parents and local community. One principal stated, principals had to "walk the walk."

Although the schools in the collective case study had similar stories about the turnaround process, each school's culture dictated specific steps that needed to be taken to achieve the goal of increased student academic achievement. The principal practices reported through the principal interviews that led to their successes in the turnaround process were:

- Facilitate positive change in the school culture.
- Increase communication with students and stakeholders to build the vision for school improvement and facilitate needed changes.
- Provide professional development to support the needed curricular and instructional changes.
- Use data for decisions regarding curriculum and instructional changes.
- Provide time and structures for increased teacher collaboration to implement curriculum and instructional changes.
- Sustain the turnaround, including, vision, mission, goals, values and restructuring resource allocation through systems level change.
- Create a sense of urgency for change.

Implications

Importance of Monitoring and Supports

A principal stated, "What gets monitored get done." The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education provided the outside pressure necessary to create a

sense of urgency in the schools to make the needed changes. The first change was leadership. Leadership change came through either a new principal being hired, or the current principal attending MoLEAD, an intensive, leadership training mandated by DESE. DESE provided further support to the principals through the area supervisors. The area supervisors had regular meetings with the principals to monitor and support progress on school improvement goals. The Regional Professional Development Centers worked with the principals and teachers by providing professional development to implement changes in curriculum and instruction. Based on the interview data, change was mandated at the state level, and supports were provided to help the school leaders, which played a role in the successful turnaround.

Professional Development on School Culture Change

School leaders need professional development on how to change school culture. Principals in the study received professional development specific to leading school change, through MoLEAD, the RPDC's or Richard DuFour's Professional Learning Community Conference. School turnaround was a daunting task, but given the professional development and support, school leaders were given the needed tools to be successful.

Principal Practices and Hiring Rural School Principals

Principal practices had a role in the hiring of rural school elementary principals. The elementary principals participating in the study had concrete knowledge and skills, as well as soft skills. Information from the study provided a framework to consider when hiring a new principal for a rural turnaround school. With the importance of culture in the

turnaround process, it is important to hire a candidate who understands the importance of culture and the unique challenges of a rural high poverty culture. The candidate should also possess knowledge of what is needed to change the culture of a school. The second factor to be considered in hiring is the importance of communication skills. The ability to communicate effectively to all stakeholders is key to making lasting systems changes. An understanding of best practices in curriculum and instruction is necessary to be the instructional leader of a building. To this end, new researched-based, best practices are always emerging; therefore an elementary principal must be the lead learner of the school. Data use was mentioned frequently by the principals, and noted for its importance in decision-making. Hiring a candidate who demonstrates an understanding of the importance of data and it use will help to move a school forward in the turnaround process. Another factor to consider when hiring is the resourcefulness of the candidates. The elementary principals in the study shared examples of how they are able to get the most out of their limited budgets and find outside funding sources. A question to consider is, have the candidates been successful in grant writing? The data points to the importance of hiring an experienced educator. The elementary principals participating in the interviews had a mean of 20.95 years in education, 10.18 years of teaching experience and 6.04 years in the district.

School Consolidation

Missouri's non-consolidated schools show greater success in increasing student achievement than larger consolidated systems other Midwest states. If consolidated, rural, high poverty schools have persistent in low student achievement, a district may consider

the benefits of deconsolidation to provide students with the attention necessary to improve learning. Howley, et al.'s (2011) research on rural, high poverty schools indicates -- the smaller the school, the higher the student achievement.

Future Research

Future studies based on the findings of this study include the following questions: Given the same practices put into place by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, in particular MoLEAD, at these schools would consolidated schools experience similar results?

Would the practices employed by the Missouri rural elementary principals have the same results if implemented in other rural regions of the United States? Based on the unique demographics and cultures of small rural communities, would the practices of these Missouri rural elementary principals produce higher student achievement in areas that have higher minority or English Language Learner populations?

To study one school as an in-depth individual case study during a five-year period to track the sustainability of improved student achievement using the MAP scores used in the study through 2018. To study throughout the next five years, the sustainability of the results and future improvements in the 22 schools.

After the Recorder Is Turned "Off"

A third question that emerged from casual conversations with the elementary principals after the interviews ended. The question surrounded their religious beliefs and backgrounds, and faith playing a role in their success. Local pastors spoke of their faith being part of the reason for working in high poverty areas. Words used such as blessed,

seeing their students at Church, Christmas trees in lobbies, faculty meeting in the morning voluntarily to pray. The question to be investigated is, "What role does an elementary principal's faith or religious beliefs play in turnaround leadership?"

Limitations

The collective case collective case study included 22 rural high-poverty turnaround elementary schools in Missouri. The findings cannot be generalized to all rural, high-poverty turnaround elementary schools. The schools in the study were classified as rural distant and rural remote, which are defined as follows:

Rural distant – United States census defined rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster (NCES, 2013).

Rural remote -- United States census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is more than 10 miles from an urban cluster (NCES, 2013).

The effect of the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education regulations connected with the NCLB waiver pose circumstances unique to this study. States with different guidelines and requirements may produce different results. Future studies could include widening the study to include all Midwest states and the rural, high-poverty turnaround schools, taking into account the variations in state regulations and student achievement assessments.

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Appendix A

Principal Initial Contact Protocol

Dear _____,

My name is Julie Delaney, and I'm a doctoral student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. I am studying the practices of Missouri rural elementary school turnaround principals. In order to find principals of turnaround schools, I used data from the Missouri State Department of Education website between the years of 2009 through 2013. During those years, the school where you are principal showed an increase in achievement.

I am contacting you to inquire if you would be a participant in a research project that I am conducting. Participation in the study involves a one-hour interview. I know as a principal you have a very busy schedule. I want to honor your time. The interview will take place at a time and location convenient for you.

If you are interested in participating in the study, please fill out the attached Response Form. You may send the Response Form in the following ways:

a) Reply to this email and attach the Response Form.

b) Fax the Response Form to 563-322-2530.

c) Send the form via US Mail to the address below.

Email – delaneyeii@yahoo.com
US Mail – Julie Delaney, 3212 Kenwood Ave, Davenport, IA, 52807
Cell Phone – 563-468- 8571
Fax – 563-322-2530
Thank you again for your willingness to participate in the study.

Sincerely,
Julie Delaney

Marilyn L. Grady mgrady1@unl.edu Office: (402) 472-0974

Appendix B

Superintendent Initial Contact Protocol

Dear _____,

My name is Julie Delaney, and I'm a student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. I am studying the practices of Missouri rural elementary school turnaround principals. In order to find Missouri turnaround schools, I used data from the Missouri State Department of Education website between the years of 2009 through 2013. During those years, _____ school in your district showed an increase in achievement.

I am contacting you to inquire if you would be a participant in the study I am conducting. Participation in the study involves a one-hour interview. I know as a superintendent you have a very busy schedule. I want to honor your time. The interview will take place at a time and location that is convenient for you.

If you are interested in participating in the study, please fill out the attached Response Form. You may send the Response Form in the following ways:

d) Reply to this email and attach the Response Form.

e) Fax the Response Form to 563-322-2530.

f) Send the form via US Mail to the address below.

Email – delaneyeii@yahoo.com
US Mail – Julie Delaney, 3212 Kenwood Ave, Davenport, IA, 52807
Cell Phone – 563-468- 8571
Fax – 563-322-2530

Thank you again for your willingness to participate in the study.

Sincerely,
Julie Delaney

Marilyn L. Grady mgrady1@unl.edu Office: (402) 472-0974

Appendix C

Principal Phone Protocol

Hello _____, my name is Julie Delaney, and I'm a doctoral student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. I am studying the practices of rural elementary school turnaround principals. I am calling to follow up on an email I recently sent to you regarding the study. In order to find principals of turnaround schools, I used data from the Missouri State Department of Education website between the years of 2009 through 2013. During those years, the school where you are principal showed an increase in achievement. The improvement in your school's academic achievement is impressive

I am contacting you to inquire if you would be a participant in the study I am conducting. Participation in the study involves a one-hour interview. I know as a principal, you have a very busy schedule. I want to honor your time. The interview will take place at a time and location convenient to you.

I would like to record the interview in order to accurately reflect your thoughts and observations. You may request that the tape recorder be turned off at any time. We will talk about your work as the principal. In our discussion, I am going to ask you questions that will require you to describe, in your own words, your work and activities as well as leadership in your school.

I will be asking you to describe or give examples of your work habits, activities and practices.

Do you have any questions I can answer regarding the study?

Are you willing to be a participant in the study on the practices of rural Missouri elementary school turnaround principals?

No – Thank you for your time and best wishes for continued success.

Yes – Thank you for agreeing to participate. Our next step is to set up a date to complete the face-to-face interview.

Do you have time now to consult your calendar to set up a date?

Yes - (Make appointment) I will send a follow up email to verify the date and time.

No - I will send a follow up email with some suggested dates to see if any of those will work for your schedule.

Thank you for your time today and I look forward to meeting you. Have a great day!

Appendix D

Superintendent Phone Protocol

Hello _____, my name is Julie Delaney, and I'm a doctoral student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. I am studying the practices of rural Missouri elementary turnaround principals. I am calling to follow up on an email I recently sent to you regarding the study. I would like to learn about actions taken in your school district to increase student achievement. In order to locate turnaround schools, I used data from the Missouri State Department of Education website, between the years of 2009 through 2013. During those years, the district where you are superintendent had at least one school that showed an increase in achievement of 10% or more in Reading or Math.

I am contacting you to inquire if you would be a participant in the study I am conducting. Participation in the study involves a one-hour interview. I know you have a very busy schedule. I want to honor your time. The interview will take place at a time and location that is convenient to you.

I would like to record the interview in order to accurately reflect your thoughts and observations. You may request that the tape recorder be turned off at any time. We will talk about actions taken within the district to improve student achievement.

Do you have any questions I can answer for you regarding the study?

Are you willing to be a participant in the study on the practices of rural Missouri elementary school turnaround principals?

No – Thank you for your time and best wishes for continued success.

Yes – Thank you for agreeing to participate. Our next step is to set up a date to complete the face-to-face interview.

Do you have time now to consult your calendar to set up a date?

Yes - (Make appointment) I will send a follow up email to verify the date and time.

No - I will send a follow up email with some suggested dates to see if any of those will work for your schedule.

Thank you for your time today and I look forward to meeting you. Have a great day!

Appendix E

Department of Secondary and Elementary Education Area Supervisor Initial Contact Protocol

Dear _____,

My name is Julie Delaney. I'm a doctoral student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. I am studying the practices of Missouri rural elementary school turnaround principals. The increase in academic achievement in Missouri's rural, high poverty elementary schools is impressive. Due to the high number of turnaround schools in the state, I would like to learn more about the actions the state of Missouri has taken to increase student achievement.

I am contacting you to request your participation in the study. Participation in the study involves an interview that will last no longer than one hour. The interview will take place in a location that is convenient for you.

If you are interested in participating in the study, please fill out the attached Response Form. You may send the Response Form in the following ways:

g) Reply to this email and attach the Response Form.

h) Fax the Response Form to 563-322-2530.

i) Send the form via US Mail to the address below.

Email – delaneyeii@yahoo.com
US Mail – Julie Delaney, 3212 Kenwood Ave, Davenport, IA, 52807
Cell Phone – 563-468- 8571
Fax – 563-322-2530

Once I receive your form, I will follow up by telephone to set up an appointment for the interview. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Julie Delaney

Marilyn L. Grady mgrady1@unl.edu Office: (402) 472-0974

Appendix F

RPDC Consultant Initial Contact Protocol

Dear _____,

My name is Julie Delaney. I'm a doctoral student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. I am studying the practices of Missouri rural elementary school turnaround principals. The increase in academic achievement in Missouri's rural, high poverty elementary schools is impressive. Due to the high number of turnaround schools in the state, I would like to learn more about the actions the state of Missouri has taken to increase student achievement.

I am contacting you to request your participation in the study. Participation in the study involves an interview that will last no longer than one hour. The interview will take place in a location that is convenient for you.

If you are interested in participating in the study, please fill out the attached Response Form. You may send the Response Form in the following ways:

j) Reply to this email and attach the Response Form.

k) Fax the Response Form to 563-322-2530.

l) Send the form via US Mail to the address below.

Email – delaneyeii@yahoo.com
US Mail – Julie Delaney, 3212 Kenwood Ave, Davenport, IA, 52807
Cell Phone – 563-468- 8571
Fax – 563-322-2530

Once I receive your form, I will follow up by telephone to set up an appointment for the interview. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Julie Delaney

Marilyn L. Grady mgrady1@unl.edu Office: (402) 472-0974

Appendix G

Principal Interview Protocol

Time of interview:

Date of interview:

Location:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Interview Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study on rural turnaround principals. With your permission I would like to record this interview in order to accurately reflect your thoughts and observations. You may request that the tape recorder be turned off at any time. The improvement in your school's academic achievement is impressive.

Today we are going to talk about your work as the principal. In our discussion, I am going to ask you questions that will require you to describe, in your own words, your work and activities as well as leadership within your school.

I will be asking you to describe or give examples of your work habits, activities and practices. ("I send an email every Friday, or meet with the teachers every Tuesday morning").

Are you ready? Let's begin.

Interview Questions

1. Describe your school's turnaround process. Can you tell me the story**?**
2. What are the top three school-wide practices that are most notable in the turnaround process at your school?
3. What makes you think of those?
4. What are the unique challenges in your school's effort to increase student achievement?
5. What actions has the school taken to overcome those challenges?

6. What changes in curriculum were made to increase student achievement during the time frame in which you raised student achievement?
7. What instructional practices have changed in the school that you would attribute to increased student academic achievement?
8. What professional development initiatives have occurred that you would attribute to increased student achievement?
9. Describe your core leadership practices?
10. What is the most important practice or action a principal can do to raise student achievement?
11. Describe your various roles as principal?
12. Of all the roles you play as principal, which is the most important in contributing to increased student academic achievement?
13. What actions had the Missouri Department of Education taken that you would attribute to increased student academic achievement?
14. What do you think is the most important factor in the increased student achievement scores in your school?
15. How many years have you been in education?
16. How many years were you a teacher before going into administration?
17. How many years have you been in administration?
18. Is there anything else you would like to say about turnaround elementary schools in Missouri?

Appendix H

Superintendent Interview Protocol

Time of interview:

Date of interview:

Location:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Interview Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the study on rural turnaround principals. With your permission I would like to record this interview in order to accurately reflect your thoughts and observations. You may request that the tape recorder be turned off at any time. The improvement in _____school's academic achievement is impressive.

Today we are going to talk about your work as the superintendent in relation to _____ school. In our discussion, I am going to ask you questions that will require you to describe, in your own words, the work and activities as well as leadership within your schools that contributed to the increase in student scores.

I will be asking you to describe or give examples of the activities and practices of your school district and principals. ("I send an email every Friday, or meet with the principals every Tuesday morning").

Are you ready? Let's begin.

Interview Questions

1. Describe_____ school's turnaround process. Can you tell me the story?
2. What are the top three things that are most notable in the turnaround process?
3. What makes you think of those?
4. What are the unique challenges in _____ school's effort to increase student achievement?
5. What actions has the school taken to overcome those challenges?

6. What actions has the district taken to overcome those challenges
7. What changes in curriculum were made to increase student achievement during the time frame in which student achievement was raised?
8. What changes in teaching practice were made to increase student achievement during the time frame in which student achievement was raised?
9. What changes in personnel were made to increase student achievement during the time frame in which student achievement was raised?
10. What is the most important practice a principal can do to raise student achievement?
11. What do you think is the most important factor in the increased student achievement scores in _____ school?
12. Is there anything I missed that you would like to share with me?

Appendix I

Department of Secondary and Elementary School Area Supervisor Interview Protocol

Time of interview:

Date of interview:

Location:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Interview Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the study on rural turnaround principals. With your permission I would like to record this interview in order to accurately reflect your thoughts and observations. You may request that the tape recorder be turned off at any time. The improvement in _____school's academic achievement is impressive.

Today we are going to talk about your work as the superintendent in relation to _____ school. In our discussion, I am going to ask you questions that will require you to describe, in your own words, the work and activities as well as leadership within your schools that contributed to the increase in student scores.

I will be asking you to describe or give examples of the activities and practices of your school district and principals. ("I send an email every Friday, or meet with the principals every Tuesday morning").

Are you ready? Let's begin.

Interview Questions

1. Describe_____ school's turnaround process. Can you tell me the story?
2. What are the top three things that are most notable in the turnaround process?
3. What makes you think of those?
4. What are the unique challenges in _____ school's effort to increase student achievement?

5. What actions has the school taken to overcome those challenges
6. What actions has the district taken to overcome those challenges
7. What changes in curriculum were made to increase student achievement during the time frame in which student achievement was raised
8. What changes in teaching practice were made to increase student achievement during the time frame in which student achievement was raised
9. What changes in personnel were made to increase student achievement during the time frame in which student achievement was raised?
10. What is the most important practice a principal can do to raise student achievement?
11. What do you think is the most important factor in the increased student achievement scores in _____ school?
12. Tell me about the Missouri Department of Education's Top 10 by 20 initiative.
13. Tell me about MoLEAD.
14. What is your role in working with schools and principals to increase student achievement?
15. Is there anything I missed that you would like to share with me?

Appendix J

Regional Professional Development Center Consultant Interview Protocol

Time of interview:

Date of interview:

Location:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Interview Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the study on rural turnaround principals. With your permission I would like to record this interview in order to accurately reflect your thoughts and observations. You may request that the tape recorder be turned off at any time. The improvement in _____school's academic achievement is impressive.

Today we are going to talk about your work as the superintendent in relation to _____ school. In our discussion, I am going to ask you questions that will require you to describe, in your own words, the work and activities as well as leadership within your schools that contributed to the increase in student scores.

I will be asking you to describe or give examples of the activities and practices of your school district and principals. ("I send an email every Friday, or meet with the principals every Tuesday morning").

Are you ready? Let's begin.

Interview Questions

1. Describe_____ school's turnaround process. Can you tell me the story?
2. What are the top three things that are most notable in the turnaround process?
3. What makes you think of those?
4. What are the unique challenges in _____ school's effort to increase student achievement

5. What actions has the principal taken to overcome those challenges?
6. What actions has the district taken to overcome those challenges?
7. What changes in curriculum were made to increase student achievement during the time frame in which student achievement was raised
8. What changes in teaching practice were made to increase student achievement during the time frame in which student achievement was raised?
9. What changes in personnel were made to increase student achievement during the time frame in which student achievement was raised?
10. What is the most important practice a principal can do to raise student achievement?
11. What do you think is the most important factor in the increased student achievement scores in _____ school?
12. Is there anything I missed that you would like to share with me?

Appendix K

Transcription Confidentiality Form

I, _____, transcriptionist, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all audiotapes and documentation received from Julie C. Delaney related to her doctoral study Turnaround Elementary Principals in Rural Missouri. Furthermore, I agree:

1. To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of audio taped interviews, or in any associated documents;

2. To not make copies of any audiotapes or computerized files of the transcribed interview texts, unless specifically requested to do so by Julie C. Delaney;

3. To store all study-related audiotapes and materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession;

4. To return all audiotapes and study-related documents to Julie C. Delaney in a complete and timely manners.

I am aware that I can be held legally liable for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audiotapes and/or files to which I will have access.

_____ _____

Transcriptionist Signature Date

_____ _____

Researcher Signature Date

141 Teachers College Hall / P.O. Box 880360 / Lincoln, NE 68588-0360 / (402) 472-3726 / FAX (402) 472-4300

Appendix L

All Participant Thank You and Transcript Approval Form

Dear_____,

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me regarding the practices of Missouri turnaround principals in the rural elementary setting. Enclosed is transcript of my interview with you. Once you have reviewed the transcripts, please use this form to either approve the transcript as presented, or approve the transcript with recommendations.

Please return this form, along with any recommendations to me in one of the following ways:

a) Email the form to delaneyeii@yahoo.com

b) US Mail - Julie Delaney, 3212 Kenwood Ave., Davenport, Iowa 52807

c) Fax: (563) 322-2530

I appreciate your participation in the study.

Sincerely,

Julie C. Delaney

Marilyn L. Grady mgrady1@unl.edu Office: (402) 472-0974

Transcript Approval

_____I approve the transcript as presented.

_____I approve the transcript with the enclosed recommendations.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Appendix M

Participant Informed Consent Form

IRB#

Title: Turnaround Elementary Principals in Rural Missouri

Purpose:
The purpose of this study is to describe the practices of "turnaround" principals in the Missouri rural elementary school setting. You must be 19 years of age or older to participate. You are invited to participate in this study because you are the principal or the superintendent of a Missouri rural high poverty school that has significantly improved test scores between 2009 and 2013, or a consultant for the Missouri Department of Education.

Procedures:
You will be asked to participate in a one-hour face-to-face interview. The face-to-face interview will be conducted at a time and location convenient to you. The interview will be audio recorded. A follow up interview will be conducted via telephone if additional information or clarification is needed. This interview will last up to one hour and will be audio recorded. Following transcription of the interview, a transcript will be sent to you for verification.

Benefits:
There are no direct benefits to you as a research participant. The benefits to others include insights into practices used by rural elementary school principals that will facilitate turning around a failing school.

Risks and/or Discomforts:
There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

Confidentiality:
Any information obtained during this study, which could identify you, including your name, and the school and district names will be kept strictly confidential. The data will be stored in a locked cabinet in the investigator's home and will only be seen by the investigator during the study and for 3 years after the study is complete. The information obtained in this study may be published in journals or presented at conferences, but the data will be reported as aggregated data.

Opportunity to Ask Questions:
You may ask any questions concerning this research and have those questions answered before agreeing to participate in or during the study. Or you may contact the

investigator(s) at the phone numbers below. Please contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board at (402) 472-6965 to voice concerns about the research or if you have any questions about your rights as a research participant

Freedom to Withdraw:
Participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, or in any other way receive a penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Consent, Right to Receive a Copy:
You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

☐ Yes, I give my permission to be audio recorded.

Signature of Participant:

_____ _____
Signature of Research Participant Date

Name and Phone number of investigator(s)

Julie C. Delaney Office: (563) 322-2923 Cell (563) 468-8571

Marilyn L. Grady Office: (402) 472-0974